The Turning Point

BY
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WILLIAM BRIGGS
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CHAPTER I.

A SKY of continuous grey made the snow look whiter by contrast. It lay packed in wintry depth around the bluffs that stretched along the northwest quarter section that was known as Robinson's farm. Old Robinson sometimes felt as though he were Robinson Crusoe, so far as loneliness was concerned. The isolation of a prairie farm is never felt so much as in the winter, when the snow makes the land one of white and dreary silence.

The poplars that skirted the farm stood like solemn sentinels; their frozen branches cracking and grinding together as the northeast wind blew the loose snow from the neighboring prairie and stubble land, and packed it in deep drifts around them.

On a slight elevation above the said stubble waste was the Robinsons' house—a typical settler's home of the Northwest. Huge poles jointed into each other at the corners supported the straw-thatched roof. There was no chimney of brick or stone—that could have been too expensive. A stove-pipe

pierced the roof and answered the purpose. It was prosaic but useful. The farmer of the Northwest is destitute of many of the accessories that have made the lot of the farmer in the old land a theme for descriptive writers. Robinson could remember the " ingle-neuk " at home—the broad hearth, the wide chimney, the ever-burning fire. But in the Northwest you have to take what the hardware store will give you, and combine it with the necessities of the case as best you can. Besides, you have to make the best of your fuel supply. The open old-fashioned English fire is pleasant, but ninety per cent. of the heat goes up the chimney; whereas with a stove you can get every unit of heat that your wood is capable of, barring what goes up the stove-pipe — and even that radiates caloric on its way.

Mr. Robinson was sitting close to the stove, a well-used briar pipe in his mouth from which a curling column of blue smoke went up to the rafters. He was between fifty and sixty years old, and his weather-beaten, deep-lined face told of hard times and strenuous work.

On this wintry afternoon there was nothing for the farmer to do outside, so he thought he might as well take what solace he could out of a quiet smoke by the stove. Opposite to him sat his daughter, a girl of uncommon beauty, whose wealth of brown hair was tinged with lights of gold.

The old man's gaze had been wandering back and forth from the stove to his daughter, and from his daughter to the window, for some minutes. Gladys — that was her name — was engaged in extracting the last item of interest from a much-read newspaper that gave evidence of having been passed from hand to hand; even the advertisements become interesting to one cooped up in a North-west farm.

"Gladys, where are the boys?" said Mr. Robinson, rising and going to the window.

"They are cutting wood in the bluffs, dad."

She rose and put more wood in the stove. She put down the newspaper on a table of the old man's making, and taking up a stocking she commenced to knit—an art she had learned from her dead mother—and sat down again, and her eye wandered round the home-made furniture of the plain living-room. A cushion or two that she had "worked," and a lithographed calendar that hung upon the wall, were almost the only spots of color.

"It's a bad day to be out, my girl; though nothing will stop those boys I reckon."

He sat down in his chair again, and the crackling of the wood in the stove and the tick-tack of the little nickel-plated alarm clock, on its bracket, were the only sounds.

"Gladys, my girl, it's a long time coming," he said at last.

"What, dad?"

"Why, spring, my lass."

Gladys glanced at the calendar. It was the middle of April, and there had been no sign of a break in the wintry weather.

"Oh, well, it will be here presently, dad. We must keep our hearts up."

But her brave words belied her real feelings, for well she knew what was at stake. She knew that her father relied on the coming crop to pull him out of debt, and it really looked no nearer spring than it did a month ago. The seeding would be thrown late, which would make the chances poor for a good crop. A late spring means risks: if followed by frosts, coming early after the summer, the grain, not being mature, would be frozen, and its value largely depreciated.

"That's what you said a week ago, weather prophet. I don't think you are better in that line than the rest of them. But you are a good girl, and I don't know what I should do without you."

"Well, you know, dad, there's no use meeting trouble half-way."

The old man got up and went to the window again, for he saw that the slight fall of snow which had attracted his attention before had now increased. It was falling in thick flakes, drifted hither and thither by a bitter east wind that seemed likely to develop into a blizzard.

And this in April!

It had been a long and severe winter, very hard and trying to the old settlers. Flour and all provisions had been up to famine prices. Difficulties of transportation had confronted the pioneers, and on top of everything two bad years — the crop a failure.

Lured by the call of the West, these settlers, with hardly a dollar to their names, had come from Ontario, after Mrs. Robinson died — a few years before the opening of this story. Robinson had homesteaded land that lay in a bluffy district more than twenty miles from the railway. He stuck to it, and he and his sons surmounted unheard-of difficulties. He served the homestead regulations and obtained a title for his land. There was little work to be had in the district, and scanty wages at that. It meant hard work and hard living; credit at the store that became more and more grudging. At last Robinson found it necessary to mortgage his land. Struggle as he would he found it very difficult to pay the interest. And now, when our story opens, foreclosure of the mortgage stared him in the face. He seemed likely to lose the fruit of all his efforts. Well might the old man, who had worked his hardest and done his most valiant best, feel dispirited as he looked out on that April afternoon and saw a blizzard that seemed appropriate to the depth of winter rather than to a nominally springtime month.

He had one hundred acres "broke," which he intended to seed down with wheat. But would he be able to accomplish it?

A shout outside made Gladys bound from her chair and run to the window.

"The boys are coming, dad," she said, gaily.

Hardly had she spoken when the door swung open and a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking young man strode in, stamping the snow from his feet on the solid floor.

"Well, my goodness! This *is* a day," he said, pulling off his sheepskin coat and mitts, and throwing them at the back of the stove. Then he began to pull away the icicles from his moustache. "All winter nowadays," he continued. "We may as well make up our minds to get ready for Christmas. Talk about April showers and May flowers! What d'ye think of this?"

The old man sat silent.

"You naughty boy, to throw your coat and mitts on the floor like this," said Gladys, picking them up and shaking off the snow which was melting to drops of water. "Poor old boy! Is he frozen then, and does he want his supper?" she continued playfully.

"No, I ain't to say froze — but I tell you I'm pretty near it. Gad! it's cold."

"Where's Will?" said the old man, putting a stick or two more of wood on the fire.

"Taking the team to the stable, dad. We had it to bring up the load of dry wood we cut this morning."

"You should ha' chose a better day, lad."

"All days seem to be about the same now. The wood had to be got; we were clean run out. I'm tired to death of the blamed winter — blizzards blowing all the time."

"Now, Fred, don't get mad," said his sister, putting her hand on his broad shoulders. "Who knows? To-morrow may come a thaw."

Fred laughed loudly.

"The end of the world, you might have said, Gladys. I would not be any more surprised."

The kettle was hissing and singing upon the stove, and Gladys rose to prepare the table for supper, while she restrained a sigh. No matter how low her spirits fell, the brave girl was determined that her brothers and her old father should not see that she was downhearted.

"By the by, dad, we are in for more trouble," said Fred.

"What do you mean?" said his father.

"Well, I tell you, you should have seen Major Thompson this afternoon. He met me on the stubble that leads to his house, and he was in a towering rage. My! he was mad! Said our cattle had broke through his fence into his oat stack and

was playing havoc with his precious oats. We've got to pay damages, he says."

Robinson's face clouded and his eyes sparkled with anger.

"Damages be blowed! Did ye tell him to put up stronger fences?"

Fred pulled his moustache and sat silent.

The old man rose and paced about the room. Suddenly he stopped.

"Did ye see the fence, Fred?" he asked.

"Yes. I drove the cattle away. Anyhow, the fence was that drifted up wi' snow the cattle had no trouble getting in — it was all a plain, clear road for 'em."

"And he expects me to pay damages for that? I'll damage him! Mark me, Thompson doesn't rule the Northwest—not by a —— sight—no matter what swell he be."

He turned and left the room.

Fred rose and went into the kitchen. He saw that his father was thoroughly worked up; and no wonder! There had been enough trouble to drive a stronger man off his head, he mused. "Such is life in the Northwest," he said with a sigh.

Gladys was bending over the stove, and Fred stole up to her on tiptoe, so that she would not hear him, and threw his arms gently around her.

"Well, my little sister," he said kindly, "what are you busy at? Always at work, eh?"

She started.

"How naughty of you, Fred!" she pouted.

"Did I scare you, Gladys? So sorry!" he said jokingly.

She laughed.

"But you did not say what you were doing."

"Cooking supper, of course. Are you not hungry?"

"You bet, Gladys!" he said, smacking his lips. "Have you ever found me not?"

Again she broke into a merry laugh.

His eyes followed hers. She was glancing at a few pounds of pork that was hanging up — the remnants of a three-hundred-pound pig killed only a short time before.

"Now say I have eaten it all." His eyes twinkled mischievously as he glanced at her.

"No, no; Will's as bad as you."

"Father and Gladys too," he added roguishly. Whereupon they both laughed.

From behind them their laugh was repeated, but in a gruffer key; and looking round they saw their brother, who had just come in from feeding up the team and cattle.

"Smells good, Gladys, old girl!" he exclaimed. "And I'm as hungry as a hawk too."

"Just a minute, Will," she said, pouring the boiling water into the teapot, "and all will be ready to satisfy such hungry monsters."

The boys had a remarkable resemblance to each

other. Although Will was a little taller, Fred made up for that lack by being the stouter. Both had brown hair, blue eyes and open countenance, and were above the average in looks and strength. Will was the eldest, being twenty-five. Fred was two and a half years younger. Gladys was eighteen, and the boys adored her. Will drew his chair to the table by the side of his brother. His eyes rested upon his sister, and he thought that every day she seemed to be getting more beautiful. Whether it really was so, or his seeing no other girls made him think so, he could hardly guess.

She did not notice his gesture, for she was glancing around the room.

"Where's father?" she asked.

"Don't know," answered Fred. "Gone out somewhere."

She turned to Will.

"Surely he did not go to Thompson's a night like this!" she said. She remembered the conversation between him and Fred.

"To Thompson's? Why?" asked Will.

"I was telling him about old Thompson and our cattle breaking into his fence," said Fred.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Will. "That accounts for it. I saw the old man going around the wood-pile; then I thought he was after an armful of wood. He must have gone on to Thompson's."

For a moment they sat in silence.

Outside the wind was h ling and moaning around the old log building. The night was of inky darkness, but they knew by th ound of the wind's roar that a great blizzard raged.

"You will go after him, Will?" she asked. There was a tremor in her voice.

"Sure, sister," he said, swallowing down a cup of tea. "Now don't look so scared, Gladys," he continued playfully, patting her gently under her chin. "I'll have the old man back ere long."

He reached for the lantern, and, lighting it, went out. Gladys rose. Her face was a shade paler and her hand trembled as she placed the old man's slippers to warm by the stove.

Fred went on eating his supper.

"Are you not hungry, Gladys?" he asked.

"I will wait, Fred, until father comes back. But don't you; you are hungry, I am sure, after the work in the bluff."

She placed the meat back in the oven, to keep warm; then, picking up some worsted from the sideboard, commenced patching up some old lumbermen's stockings of the old man's.

"I wish I had never told dad about the cattle and that confounded Thompson," muttered Fred. "Fool I was, but I did not think he would go and see him to-night."

CHAPTER II.

THERE could scarcely be a greater contrast than the one presented by the respective circumstances of the Robinsons and of their neighbor Major Thompson.

A retired military man, with all the prepossessions and prejudices of his class, Major Thompson had no doubt emigrated to Canada because his wealth, though large as compared with the poverty of the Robinsons, was not sufficient to enable him to shine in his natural circle in England. He had come to the Northwest about two years after his neighbors had settled there, and had at once prepared to farm on a large scale, though he had but little practical knowledge of the business. He was one of those men who, to use a common expression, "know it all." Overbearing in manner, he came to the Dominion with the idea that he could "teach the Canadians a thing or two," and even when unkind experiences had shown the folly of his attitude, he endeavored to preserve a bluff and superior aspect.

Major Thompson had bought a whole section — 640 acres — adjoining the smaller Robinson home-

stead. Not an acre had had the breaking-plough put into it, nor was there any shred of building on it. But the Major had large ideas, and proceeded to put them into execution with a great show of military promptness. He bought lumber by the carload from British Columbia. He employed architects and builders. Soon a very commodious and well-appointed residence was erected of which any settler who had been successful for years might have been proud. Extensive farm buildings flanked the house. He bought ten horses, a thoroughbred Clydesdale stallion, and a bunch of fifty head of cattle. He was a good customer to the implement dealers, and soon had the most modern agricultural appliances. Then, setting to work, he had every available acre broken up, the balance being bluff land and hay sleughs. It was at about this time that Major Thompson, going into his accounts, discovered that he had spent so many thousands of dollars that his available capital was considerably reduced.

The house was built with the front facing the south, upon elevated ground. A verandah, ornamented with creepers in the summer-time, gave beauty to the front of the building. The large front door with its beautiful stained glass was thrown wide open to let in the spring air; for the thaw that Gladys had predicted after the storm had actively set in, and the house seemed oppressively warm.

The inside, like the outside, spoke of considerable outlay. The rooms were artistically furnished; the large reception-room would do credit to many up-to-date town residences.

In a comfortable chair sat Major Thompson, apparently in a deep reverie, idly turning his thumbs in and out of each other — a pastime he was very fond of when in deep study. He looked just what his title represented him to be—a soldier. His head was large and well proportioned, with hair cropped close around his massive forehead. A black moustache, worn in the military style, covered his thin lips. He was tall and had broad square shoulders.

Steps in the passage arrested his attention. Pulling a cigar case out of his vest pocket, he chose a cigar. He returned it to the case, however, as a setter which had been lying at his feet arose and bounded to the door, which at that moment opened.

"Down, down, Jack," a gentle voice commanded.

"You are late this morning, dear," the Major said, pulling out his watch.

"Yes, or you are early, Herbert."

"Maybe a little earlier than usual." He glanced towards the window and a smile spread across his handsome features.

Her eyes followed his. She smiled too.

"Spring; that accounts for it," she said as they sat down to breakfast.

Finishing the meal, he rose and lit his cigar.

"Herbert, what did Robinson want last night? Such a wild night to be out in," Mrs. Thompson said, clearing away the breakfast. Thompson knitted his brows.

"He came about those cattle breaking through the fence."

"Oh, but you told his boys about it."

"Yes, yes, dear."

"They drove them away, and the hired man has mended the fence. The poor old man had no need to see you about that, Herbert."

"Hardly, dear; but there were the damages, you know." He finished the sentence in a judicial tone.

"What, Herbert?" she exclaimed. "Surely you did not fine the old man!"

"Well, hardly."

He pulled at his long moustache and looked sideways at his wife. His glance fell as he met her mild grey eyes looking sadly into his.

He coughed slightly.

"It's hard, though, to get money out of a log," he said curtly.

"Herbert! Don't be so hard on the old man. He is poor enough, and times are hard even for those who are best off. We must be neighborly."

"Oh, that's all right," said the Major, "but business is business. You will allow, my dear, that it is I who have to attend to these matters."

"But, Herbert, have a little feeling. Don't forget that old Robinson is awfully poor."

"Robinson may be poor, but whether he is or not I will not have his cursed cattle everlastingly breaking down my fences."

"But this is the first time this winter, isn't it?" she persisted.

"Maybe. How about last fall and the wheat-stacks?"

"But did you not impound the cattle, dear," she said timidly, "and demand thirty dollars damages?"

"I did; but I never got the money. I — I let him off. Fool I was! I'll never do it again."

"So kind of you, dear," she said, ignoring his last sentence; although she knew that he was compelled to let him off, for Robinson was unable to pay him and the cattle were mortgaged. She rose and left the room.

He bit savagely at his lip. "Hang it all! Why can't I be left to manage my own business?" he said.

A gentle knock came at the door.

"Come in," he responded.

"Father, mother said I was not to disturb you. I hope I shan't — shall I?"

The Major cleared his throat.

There was a pause. His daughter stood before him, tall and graceful. Her violet-colored eyes

shone bright, a smile hovered around her dainty lips. Her voice had a musical ring, and the Major's gloom vanished for a moment, and then came back again. Perhaps these days the Major was growing gloomy.

"Well, no, Ada," he said mildly.

She stooped down to pick up a paper he had let fall, and placed it on the table by him.

"May I go to town to-day, father?" she asked.

She stole a somewhat wistful glance at the Major's handsome, gloomy face.

"Where are your brother and sisters?" he said, ignoring her question.

"I left Mary and Kate in the kitchen, helping mamma. Alfred, I believe, went out with the gun. I heard him telling mamma how the ducks may be coming up from the south with the thaw."

"Sooner be after the ducks, the scapegrace, than attending to the farm work."

"You judge harshly, father. Have you not got three hired men, and employ more during the season?"

"True, Ada. That's a reason, sure. I'll cut them down; it only encourages Alfred to be as lazy — as lazy ——"

He hesitated for a moment.

"As who, father, dear?"

"Well, as lazy as Jack," he said, giving the dog a kick. Jack did not approve of his master's treat-

ment. With a yelp he jumped up and bounded out of the room.

"Father, that is not like you," she said indignantly. "Am I to have my answer?" she continued. "May I or may I not go to town?"

"Your reason, Ada?"

"To get the mail and to do some shopping."

"Your first reason is an excellent one, for I have not had the mail for over two weeks; but I cannot conceive what you want to do with shopping. We have ample provisions in the house to last out a six months' siege without going on short rations."

He glanced sideways at her. Where he had expected to see a smile he noticed only a flush.

"What is it to be, Ada," he said scornfully, noticing her confusion: "a new hat, a new spring dress? Why, my dear, when will you forget that we are not in London, but in the backwoods of Canada?"

"Oh, father, don't be such a tease. May I go?" she said, almost entreatingly.

"Yes, if you wish so badly."

"Thank you, ever so much," she said, turning to leave the room.

"Ada, dear," her mother called from the kitchen. "Who's going to drive?"

"The hired man."

"Which one?"

"Jack. It's a bonny day, mother. Won't you

come?" she said, throwing her arm around her waist.

"No, love. I cannot to-day; but you must not go alone. Alfred will go with you."

"Alfred is out shooting; and who knows what time he will get back? The trails are breaking up, and by to-morrow the roads will not be passable for sleigh or wheels."

"Kate," her mother called, turning to her, "you must go with your sister; I wish it."

Kate was the oldest and Mary the youngest. They were nice girls, but would hardly be taken for Ada's sisters. Alfred, their only brother, was nineteen years old. In appearance he took after his father. He was tall and gentlemanly-looking; of a different type from the Robinson lads. Born "with a silver spoon in his mouth," he was not given to work, preferring play; and having the reins too much in his own hands, for notwithstanding all his air of military severity, Major Thompson had not trained his son well. Where he should have been stern, he was weak and yielding.

CHAPTER III.

We must now go back a little in order to narrate what took place when old Robinson went out into the storm on hearing that his irascible neighbor proposed to charge him damages on account of the depredations of his cattle.

It was the worst blizzard Canada had seen for many a year, that night, when Will left the old log house in search of his father. Although the wind had turned several degrees warmer, the snow pelted down and whirled around in a blinding mist to and fro. He wandered by the aid of the lantern in the direction in which he knew the house lay, plunging through the snowdrifts, sometimes knee-deep, sometimes deeper. At times he thought he was going in the wrong direction. So he was. If it were not for the timely thaw that set in at midnight, when the snow turned to rain, he would surely have frozen to death that wild night.

His head ached. A dazed feeling oppressed him. Terrible thoughts ran wildly through his heated brain. "Why did the old man bring us up West? To make our fortune! Ah!" He laughed in a dazed way. "A country for the rich, like the

Major, our oppressor. Poor settlers left for the States; they must thank their lucky stars. Dad should have gone; but he was obstinate, obstinate. What did we get? A small granary not a quarter full of wheat, and acres and acres of land in crop. Debts accumulating. Six months of winter. Nothing but trouble from our neighbor. Oh, God!" he groaned.

A sudden gust of the wind beat the rain, which had started to fall finely, into his face.

He stared vacantly into the darkness as one who had wakened out of a dream. "Thank God!" he shouted. "Rain!" as his waking faculties took in the surroundings. It fell softly at first, then in a downpour which lasted several minutes, then ceased.

He gazed around him. His sheepskin and clothes were frozen stiff. In front of him, how far away he could not tell, shone a feeble light. His eyes were weary, stiff and cold; and every step he plunged through the deep snow so much exhausted him that it almost seemed impossible to reach the house in sight, if it was one. Hours had gone by since he had left home, but he did not know then that he was only within a quarter of a mile of his home. He had been circling around between his own home and Thompson's.

A groan sounded in the stillness that had suddenly fallen. The snow, wind and rain had ceased.

He stood still and listened. Could it be a groan?

Not a sound; the cracking of the ice-sleughs and the beating of his heart were the only sounds that greeted him.

He plunged on through the snow. His sole thought was to reach home, for an utter exhaustion had come over him. If he had not lost the trail it would have been an easier task, but to be off the trail he realized the peril he was in should there be another fall, which was very probable.

Again he thought he heard a groan. It sounded clear. "Help! Help!" it rang out. A cold shudder crept over his frame. He stood staring wildly, holding his lantern high up in the air. It was his father's voice. A hideous horror of his father being frozen to death seized his benumbed senses and gave new life to his weary limbs. He plunged rapidly on, on, towards the spot. Horrified, he beheld his father huddled up on the trail.

"Father! Father!" he cried, throwing his strong arm around the old man and raising him up.

"My feet, my feet, Will!" the old man moaned.

"Frozen, father?"

"Yes, my boy," he groaned feebly.

He lifted the old man bodily up, and half carried and half dragged him along the well-trodden cattle trail that led from the sleugh where they watered the stock to the buildings.

CHAPTER IV.

It was not often that Farmer Robinson received a visit from his wealthy neighbor Major Thompson, or indeed from anybody else — seeing that the settlers' houses were few and far apart. A day or two after the events recorded in the last chapter, however, a knock was heard at the door. Gladys was engaged in that ever-recurring task of the women of settlers' households — washing up the dishes. She hastily dried her hands and, going to the door, ushered in the Major. Her father was lying on the couch, suffering from the effects of the frost-bites he had got in the storm and the exposure from which he had been rescued only just in time.

As he thought of the heated interview that had preceded that luckless journey, Robinson was surprised at Major Thompson coming forward with an expression on his face in which neighborly feeling was mingled with concern at the condition in which he found the old farmer. "Why, Robinson, I'm sorry to see you're on the sick-list. I heard the blizzard nipped you a bit; I hope it's nothing very serious."

"Oh, I suppose I shall get over it; a bit painful now and then. Thank you," replied Robinson.

As a matter of fact, the Major's visit was more than a mere neighborly call. He had an object in view. That morning a settler on his way north had stayed at the Major's place for breakfast, as he was a man with whom he had had some dealings. In the course of conversation he had told the important news that a railway had been planned to be built through that district, and that Robinson's quarter-section was the proposed townsite. The Major did not say much, but he immediately began to cogitate; and when the settler left he determined to go that afternoon and make Robinson a bid for his farm before the old man got wind of the proposals.

If this may seem to the reader the reverse of true neighborliness, it may be said that it was what nine men out of ten in new Western sections would have done under the circumstances. The determination to make easy money out of information of that kind is not long in being acquired.

The Major knew that Robinson was hard up. It would really be better, thought the Major, for the old man to sell his land. By the time he got to the Robinson homestead our ex-military man had almost persuaded himself that he was going to do the old farmer a good turn.

His spirits rose as he walked over the plashy ground, every now and then striking at a weed with the switch he carried.

And now, as he sat there by the side of the old

man's couch, he looked the picture of friendliness.

"Tell you what, Robinson; I've got some capital lotion which will be the very thing for you. I'll send Alfred over with it when I get back."

"Oh, don't bother, Major. I'll soon get all right. Thank you all the same, though."

"It's no trouble, and I think you'd better have it, and Gladys thinks so too, I know. Don't you, Gladys?"

"Your daughter looks more charming every time I see her," he added after Gladys had retired.

"She's a fine, good girl," said her father, proudly.

"Robinson," the Major blurted out, "I was not myself the other night when you came to see me, and I want to make amends. I've been thinking that if you were to sell your homestead, and have the cash in hand, you would be in a far better position than you are now. Excuse my bluntness, but ready money is very useful."

"You've hit the nail on the head there, Major," said Robinson, wondering what his neighbor was driving at.

He was not left long in suspense.

"What should you say if I offered you ten dollars an acre for your homestead?"

"Sell my place, Major? Why, I'm not thinking of selling. Never had such an idea."

"Perhaps not. New ideas are sometimes good. They say opportunity knocks once at every man's

door. A man with your experience and the best part of a couple of thousand in his pocket might do a good deal."

"It's worth more than that if I was to sell — which I've no intention of doing," said the farmer.

"Well," replied the Major, pulling his cigar-case from his pocket, "try one of these, Robinson. They're a fresh lot I've just got in, and, in my humble judgment, not bad."

The farmer took one. He was pleased with his neighbor's suavity. Besides, it was a long time since he had smoked a cigar. "Yes, that's a crackerjack," he said as the blue smoke went in intermittent puffs to the roof.

They smoked in silence for awhile.

"You see, Major, it's this way: I love my homestead. It's great land, rich black loam with clay subsoil — just the stuff to raise No. 1 hard wheat. It can't be bettered."

"Oh, I don't know. I think I see your point of view all right; still, there are ups and downs to wheat farming, as you well know. Where will you be if you get a poor crop next season? It has happened before. Don't you think you will regret turning down a good cash offer?"

"It's worth more than ten dollars an acre; it's worth fifteen if it's worth one. Yes, sir!"

"Well, I shouldn't be disposed to haggle with you. If you will think it over I imagine you will

come to the conclusion that $12.50 would be a very liberal offer."

The old man shook his head in a doubtful way. He was slowly reckoning up in his mind the amount of the mortgage and interest he had to pay in the fall. He came to the conclusion that it must be upwards of $400. If not paid, his land might be seized — there was never any telling what lawyers might not do. At the same time the strong desire of his mind was to retain his land. So, though it occurred to him that he might be making a mistake in rejecting the deal proposed by the Major, he thought he would prolong the conversation a little further. Farmer Robinson had not lived in the world for nearly sixty years without acquiring some experience as to men's motives.

"You've got lots of land, Major," he said at last; "about as much as you can handle. I don't see exactly what you want to buy my bit for."

"Well, you know, Robinson, there's an old proverb that says, 'Much wants more.' I suppose I'm a bit of a crank on land-buying. Yours lies alongside of mine, and in England, you see, we learn the habit of accumulating estates. Why, my grandfather had ten thousand acres — though I got none of it, worse luck! through being a younger son; nor am I likely to, seeing my elder brother, who inherited it, has four boys. Now, out here, you see, one has a chance to get a bit of an estate together; and

we have to think of our children. I've got Alfred and his sisters to consider."

"Well, Major, to tell you the truth, I think all you've said applies to me as well as you. I want to accumulate land. If the land's increasing in value I want the value of it. You've got a boy and three gals. Well, haven't I got two boys and a gal?"

"Well done, Robinson; you are a good arguer. But I can see by your face that you see the force of my arguments; and to show you that I mean your good, I make you one last offer. I'll bring it up to your fifteen dollars per acre and ha' done with it. There now; consider well before you turn an offer like that down. Going! Going! Going!" said the Major, imitating the methods of an auctioneer. "Come, Robinson, am I to say gone?"

"No, Major. You'll excuse me, but I've made up my mind to stick by the place, and under those circumstances I must decline your offer."

"Well, you are your own judge; it's not my funeral." And bidding his neighbor a hasty good morning, Major Thompson took his leave.

His face darkened as he stepped outside. He had set his mind on buying the land, though where the money was to come from he had not determined. He had no very large supply of ready cash, but he had thought that with his neighbor's land in his possession he could manage to finance the matter through. "Confound his impudence!" said he,

aloud, as he thought of the old man's firm refusal. "He's got some sons and a daughter to think of, has he? That's the way in this country: they know no respect for their betters."

But his animadversions were cut short by the sound of horses plunging through the slush and snow. It was the cutter with Ada and Kate in it, who were coming back from town.

"Where in the world have you been, daddy? Why, what a state you are in! Why did you not put your leggings on?"

Instead of taking a trail to Robinson's he had taken a nearer cut across the stubble field and round their bluffs at the back of their shack, and the once solid drifts of snow had sunk with his weight, for the snow had softened considerably since the thaw.

He jerked his head in the direction of Robinson's by way of answer. Springing into the cutter he took the lines from the hired man and started the horses. They were weary, and plunged slowly along, their sweating flanks flecked with foam.

"The trails are almost impassable, dad. We were afraid we should not get back before they had completely gone."

"You should have waited another day, when you could have gone on wheels. Driving like this is enough to kill the horses," he said impatiently.

"But, daddy dear, we didn't know. Of course,

we're very sorry, but you mustn't blame us for doing what you said we might."

"Give them a hot bean mash, Jack, when you've rubbed them down."

Mrs. Thompson came to the window. She noticed that while Kate got out Ada remained in the cutter.

"Come, Ada; supper's ready."

"In a moment, mammy," she called. "I'm going to the stable to see Ben and Fred have their hot mash; poor things."

"But supper's ready, dear. I thought you would be hungry after your long drive."

"So I am, mammy dear. But I'll just get Jack the hot water for the mash."

Her father took up the mail and went into the house.

Arrived at the stable, Ada dismounted, and after patting the neck of Ben, her favorite horse, vanished into the kitchen, from whence she speedily reappeared with a steaming pail of water.

"'Tain't exactly like trottin' along the road in 'Ide Park, London, is it, miss?" said Jack as he took the pail from her hands. "But there's one thing, miss: the roads out here ain't that crowded you has to drive to the thickness of a coat o' paint to get through."

"That's true, Jack. I sometimes wish there were a few more people."

"Oh, they'll come in time, miss. It does seem a bit lonesome sometimes; but as my granddad used to say, 'Where the carkiss is the crows will gather,' or words to that effect."

"But we don't want crows, Jack."

"Well, miss, as granddad used to say, 'It's allers one thing or t'other.'"

"Well, I must run in; they're waiting supper. I know you'll do the horses right, Jack."

And as she vanished Jack said to himself: "If that there young lady was in London, she'd have a crowd of markises an' dooks arter her. Here her's throwed away. My! this is a bloomin' poor country for sassiety. And me as might have been drivin' of a kerridge if I'd took me granddad's advice is an 'ired man on a prairie farm."

"How did you get on with Robinson, dear?" asked Mrs. Thompson when the meal was over and the girls had retired to the kitchen to wash up the crockery.

"The old fool refused to sell," said the Major. "If he were in England the bankruptcy law would make him."

"And I suppose Robinson is glad he is not in England. Well, perhaps it is for the best. It would be a speculation if you had bought his farm."

"Nothing venture, nothing have," said her husband, sententiously.

"Well, dear, I suppose Robinson is doing just what we would do in his case."

"That may be, but that isn't the point. When you go for a thing you've got your own side to consider, and let the other fellow look after his. When you are playing a game you can't be on both sides of the board. But what he's so stuck upon is the value of the soil and the money he's going to make out of the crop. The old chump may keep it, as far as that is concerned."

"Perhaps the railway is only a rumor, Herbert. Surely we have all the land we can manage."

"Yes, but I wanted to do a stroke of business apart from the land, my dear. I suppose I'm a bit tired of this everlasting winter and this tedious farming business."

CHAPTER V.

The sun rose in a perfect sky of blue. The morning was as balmy as an old-country May day. A gentle breeze wafted across the prairie, that had thrown off its winter garb and donned its spring garment. It rippled the long dry withered grass to and fro. Here and there had sprung up green blades of grass amid clusters of crocuses, the earth's first fruits of spring. The rich black fallow, bare of the snow; the sparkling sleughs, kissed by the breeze, greeted the eye. The air was alive with the croaking of myriads of frogs. The ever-monotonous sound was broken by the shrill note of the lizard, and the quacking of ducks as they flew from sleugh to sleugh. But how refreshing! how exhilarating! — ah, only the settlers may know! There, where there had been no signs of life through the long winter, the earth asleep, wrapped in its changeless garments of snow!

The squeaking double drills from early morning till dark sounded from afar, setting the wheat seed into the dry fallows. For every settler that day was busy with the seeding.

The doors and windows of Robinson's shack

were thrown wide open. From within a voice sounded clear and sweet. It was Gladys. She was singing a lullaby while preparing the morning meal. The old man, leaving the barn where he had been milking, stood for a moment listening. A smile of contentment lingered over his weather-beaten features. How her voice reminded him of his dead wife! His thoughts went back to his little shack where she had died in Ontario. When Gladys' last note ceased it brought him to his senses, and picking up the two pailfuls of milk he had put down, he went inside.

"Flossy's drying up fast, Gladys," he remarked, absently. "But no wonder! Come, it must be a year last month since she calved. That cow has paid for herself over and over again. Next month we will have another calf; the roan is due to calve then."

"More butter, daddy, more work," she said roguishly.

"Whose complaining about work, eh?" It was Will's voice.

"Complaining? You mean joking," said the old man, laughing.

"Ah, I thought as much. I have never heard our girl complain yet."

"And you never will, till I'm an old woman," she said gravely, but immediately burst out into a ringing laugh.

"Thompson's hired men were at it early this morning with those drills, dad."

"I heard them, Will. Whereabouts are they?"

"They are seeding the field of summer fallow that joins our land on the south. One of the men told me how the Major intends to have sixty acres sown down to wheat before nightfall."

"Maybe he will; he has lots of drills, horses and help. How's Fred getting on with the seeding?"

"Oh, slow; it's hard on the team. Should have another horse on. If we were only half as rich as the Major!"

"We will be some day, Will."

"I hope so, Gladys."

"We will get the hundred acres sown down within two weeks; never fear."

"Sure, daddy, if I have to work day and night!" said Will joyfully. "I am downright glad you did not sell the quarter section the other day to the Major, dad."

A tender light lit up the old man's features. "That has set my mind at ease, Will. I was a wee bit afraid you had gone against me in not selling. Many a time I thought I may have been a fool to turn down the fifteen dollars an acre. It was a tidy sum. Would have put us clear out of debt and have a nice balance over for ourselves."

"And have lost our home, daddy. Oh, no; the Major will not make us sell it with his tempting

offer. We will pay the debt off from the crops; if not all this fall, we'll clear it next, so help us God!"

"Amen!" exclaimed Gladys.

"Yes, yes; I would have been a fool. You know I like this quarter," rambled the old man. "Great wheat land; over a hundred acres broken, and we can break more. No, no; I'd ha' held it at twenty."

"What puzzles me," remarked Will, "is the Major being so generous with his offer. It is not like him, and I am sure there must be something else that prompted him besides the land. For he has plenty of good land, a whole section."

"Maybe, Will. The Major's a great schemer."

"What if there is hidden treasure under the soil? Gold or silver mines!" exclaimed Gladys.

"Foolish child!" said the old man. "We can reap treasures of golden wheat only."

"There is one thing I know," thought Will: "that is, the Major is not financially situated to offer fifteen dollars per acre, nor not even five cash. For if rumor is true — which no doubt it is — the Major has spent the last cent of the money he had brought with him from England. He keeps three hired men the year round, and extras during harvesting. That would make a big hole in the fall-crop money. Then there is that lazy, good-for-nothing lad of an Alfred doing practically nothing. I have no patience with that boy. Such airs and

graces he puts on. It's a blessing the old man has stopped him monkeying after Gladys! I would sooner see her wed one of the Major's hired men; they would make a better living for her than that boy."

With these thoughts running through his mind he went into the granary to go on with the cleaning and bluestoning of the wheat. He was afraid, though, that Gladys had had somewhat pleasanter thoughts of Alfred than he had.

"There was talk of the Major getting a threshing machine in the fall," he mused. "If so, that was a clear way of running into a hole." What did the Major know about a machine? And Alfred did not care a button to learn anything about threshing machines; it was sure too much like work. Alfred had had a first-class education in the Old Country; the Major had placed him at one of the best schools he knew. The boy was clever enough to turn his hand to anything, but as long as the Major kept him he would not try his hand at anything. Will had had very little education. The country school he attended was not up to the standard, and he could not be considered a scholar in the proper sense of the word. As long as a pupil obtained a certain acquaintance with reading and writing and figuring, and a little spelling and copying exercises, it was thought sufficient education. Then Will preferred outdoor work and games to schooling; so it

was only natural he did not develop into much of a scholar. Nevertheless he was far better off than Alfred; for he was a good farmer, and half-educated men who think to live by their brains and wit were never intended for such work and do not make half such a success in life as men behind a plough or with an axe. Although Will was considered slow, he was not blind to the fact that his sister had a secret liking for Alfred.

It all came about in this way: It was a year last fall, when the crop was in the shook and ready for the threshers. Alfred was out riding on one of his father's thoroughbreds, a racehorse he had bought in the East. He had just left the yard when he met the threshing machine pulling in. The horse took fright and bolted. At a maddening pace he raced round the trail from Robinson's yard,when suddenly the horse tripped and threw Alfred like a shot to the ground. The boys carried him to the house, where he stayed for over a week, being too ill to be taken home. Gladys nursed him through the illness. It was after he was well enough to be removed home that Will noticed the change that had come over Gladys, and suspected that love was at the bottom of it. The ill-feeling Thompson had with the Robinsons put a complete stop to any courtship between the couple, for the Major had forbidden his family to visit or have anything to do with the Robinsons. So Gladys and Alfred were

separated at a most interesting juncture. The young people had become as fond of one another as was natural under the circumstances. But no word had been spoken, nor could Gladys be sure as she looked back over the time that he had spent in their house that anything had occurred that definitely showed that Alfred cared for her. And not till he got back home amid the familiar scenes of his own family did the young man realize that he would be very much annoyed if he heard that any fellow in the neighborhood was "making up" to Gladys. His imagination dwelt on her charming face and figure till by and by he came to the consciousness that he really adored her.

CHAPTER VI.

CANADA once again was to be blessed with a bountiful harvest. The crops from the beginning got a good start, and the rain and sunshine that followed brought them along at a great pace, so that by August the heavy wheat crop had turned a golden hue. The straw was long and the head large. Robinson predicted thirty bushels to the acre, and the Major even went so far as to expect a forty-bushel crop to the acre. Farmers were radiant with the prospect; and no wonder, for it was the first great crop the West had been blessed with. It brought back many of the settlers to the land they had deserted. Farming is a risky business, anyway, and it is not well to rely entirely on the crop until it is in the stook; then it is practically safe.

The day had been a sultry, hot one. The sun appeared a blood-red, and not a breeze stirred the atmosphere. A few days more would see the crops fit for cutting. The Major had intended to commence cutting the next day, for he had four hundred acres to harvest, and what was sown first was "dead ripe." That day the boys were busy setting up the binders. Two six-feet binders, pulled

by four sturdy horses to each, would not take so long before the standing crop would be fields of golden sheaves.

Have you seen the sun set in glory illuminating to a radiant hue miles of ripening wheat? Have you heard the steady rattle of the well-filled heads as the long straw was moved to and fro as the whispering breeze beat them together?

If you have, you know the sort of feeling that possesses the Western farmer as he looks at his crop.

We all live by hope — especially the Western wheat grower.

The sun sank, the golden hue faded. A dense black cloud began to peep angrily above the horizon to the west. The leaves of the trees rustled. A low rumble sounded in the air, while the menacing cloud grew bigger and spread across the west.

The Major left the verandah, where he had been smoking his evening pipe, and went indoors.

Four hundred acres of wheat! Estimate it as low as he reasonably could, it would surely thresh twenty bushels to the acre. Twenty bushels? He well knew that with straw and heads like that crop possessed it would yield more. It would net him, say, fifty cents a bushel. Four thousand dollars — and that was a low estimate. It would pay his hired-help expenses and give him a handsome profit. And to-morrow he would begin to reap. Everything was ready.

And at that moment a sudden startling crash of thunder rent the air. He ran out, to see the approaching storm coming on with incredible rapidity. The wind grew in violence. It swept over the crop, beating the wheat to and fro like the ocean in a tempest. The buildings creaked and swayed, and the trees on the neighboring bluffs bent to the blast. A vivid flash of lightning lit up the sky, immediately followed by a deafening clap of thunder that shook the house and went reverberating over the prairie.

The dark cloud, dense, angry and portentous, now hung over the Major's big farm. With a terrific suddenness hailstones as large as marbles swept down with a deafening roar against the shingle roof, smashing the western window-panes to bits, tearing and beating the crop, and leaving nothing standing in the wake of the awful onslaught. On, on the demon of the storm raged.

And in a few moments the tragic event was over. The storm had passed; but, alas! what destruction it had wrought!

For a mile wide had been its path, and everything in its path was destroyed. Major Thompson's crops were hailed out.

The ever-strange part of the hailstorms on the prairie is their apparent selection of some crops for destruction while those alongside may not be touched. The hail comes in streaks.

So it happened that while the Major's crops were completely destroyed the Robinsons' were only slightly damaged.

A sickening feeling oppressed the Major as he staggered into the house. His benumbed senses began to realize the extent of the damage.

Ruin stared him in the face. Damage was done that he could not compel any one to pay.

His wife and daughters had run out at the sound of the storm. With blanched faces they looked around them, and then followed the stricken man into the smoking-room, where he had thrown himself into a chair.

In a moment his hopes had been destroyed and his schemes brought to naught. Of what use were his new reaping machines now? He sat there dazed. His wife put her hand lovingly on his shoulder. Ada gently kissed his forehead.

"Cheer up, daddy," she said; "our lives have been saved."

Just then a confused noise was heard outside, and Mrs. Thompson ran out. Three of the men were carrying a limp figure up the verandah steps. She saw that it was her son they carried; his face had the pallor of death upon it. She immediately loosened his collar, and held his hand while they bore him to the dining-room and laid him on a couch. With trembling hands she poured out brandy and put it to his lips. But the men knew,

as she knelt, agonized, by the side of the couch and chafed his hands, that Alfred was dead. They had seen him struck by lightning in the very path of the storm.

Kate Thompson had followed her mother to the verandah, and she now hung distracted over the couch in an agony of terror. But the Major did not seem to realize what had happened; the previous calamity had dazed him. Staggering to his feet, he passed, supported by Ada, into the dining-room. Mrs. Thompson knelt by her son's side, passionately weeping. The Major gave one glance at the group, saw his dead son's face, and fell senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE world's work must go on though death and destruction work their will. On the following morning the sun rose in a clear sky and shone down on the bare acres of the Major's farm strewn with shapeless piles of straw, as if the reapers had been there and garnered masses of irregular sheaves. It was a desolate and heartrending waste.

And at a little distance was the waving golden crop on the Robinson acres. The steady hum of a six-foot self-binder was heard as the boys gathered in their great harvest. What a contrast was here! And it was one of the contrasts that are constantly being furnished by the great West — a contrast in more ways than one. For to the persevering, hard-working man there is no land in the world that, in the long run, will bring him such splendid returns for his labor. To the idler, the man who is not fond of work, it may be said that he had better stay away from the Western farm. He can never succeed. Even those who think they are rich enough to have their work done by hired help soon discover their mistake. Hired help robs the farmer of his profit, and when a severe reverse comes it is liable to be his downfall.

The binder hummed merrily along, every second or so clicking the golden sheaves out, for the crop was heavy. Fred ran the binder, while Will and the old man stooked. Although they were reaping the fruits of their labor, the joy they should have felt was saddened by the calamity which had fallen on their neighbor. It was heartrending to see that once beautiful crop completely destroyed; and a gloom had come over them when they had heard of the death of Alfred on that ill-fated day. Gladys, like a true girl, hid the sorrow in her heart, and none but herself knew the agony she bore.

The sky was clear, and there was a chilliness in the air that spoke of a frost that night. But the Robinsons knew well that the standing grain was too ripe to be in any way damaged should there be one; again, that chilliness put their minds at ease, for the atmosphere was too cold to bring up another thunderstorm, which they dreaded more than the frosts.

The day wore on. Ten acres of crop stood safe in the stook, and by nightfall five more acres were added. Horses and men were dead tired when they turned homeward.

"Thee hast done a great day's cutting, Fred," said the old man, with a smile lingering on his face.

"Yes, dad; the horses worked well. At that pace, in a few days the crop will be out of danger."

Gladys, hearing them outside, came out with a

lantern, for the night had fallen and there was no moon. Will took the lantern from her. A visitor had been to see her this afternoon — she whispered in his ear — Ada.

Will started, and if his face had not been so brown with the air and sunshine the flush that rose to his cheeks would have been plainly seen.

"Ada, Gladys?" he said in a surprised tone.

Gladys threw her arms around Will and wept. She just could not help it. She had borne up bravely, and her heart felt as if it were breaking. Will knew well what she felt.

"Come, little sister," he said kindly, fondly stroking her hair, that had fallen around her shoulders, "be brave. God's ways are not ours. Now, dear," he continued, after kissing away her tears, "go indoors, dear; else you will catch a cold, for the air is chilly."

She turned and went in. Will went to the stables, where Fred was unharnessing the horses, and, hanging the lantern on the beam, went out to help the old man to get hay for the horses and cattle.

He felt his heart beating wildly as he thought of his sister's visitor; the weariness that overcame him after the long day's stooking seemed to vanish. "Had not the Major forbidden any of his household to even be on speaking terms with us?" he mused. "If this calamity that has fallen upon them is bringing about a friendly feeling on their part towards us, then it verily may be a godsend."

"Good God!" escaped from his lips when his thoughts suddenly flashed back to his sister's grief, and the tears of agony that fell from her eyes were hardly dry on his shoulders. "How selfish I am getting!" He threw some forkfuls of hay into the mangers, then, patting the old mare affectionately, shut the door and went indoors. The old man and Fred were sitting at the supper table. He glanced toward Gladys, who was pouring out the tea. There was no sign of her breakdown noticeable. He was pleased. Her face, perfect in form and nobly outlined, was paler than usual, but in her eyes was a look of sublime resignation.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE funeral was over, but a deep shadow of grief lay over the Thompson homestead. The Major lay in bed, dangerously ill. It had been necessary to summon the best available medical skill. Casting about in her mind as to where this was to be found, Mrs. Thompson thought of Dr. Riggs, a very capable practitioner, for whom on one occasion, several years ago, the Major had done an important service. He lived at the city of ——, and that being over sixty miles away, Mrs. Thompson had no idea that he could personally attend to her husband's case. Her thought was that he could advise her what was best to do. However, on getting her letter, he left his practice in the care of his partner and started for the Thompson home. With a deep feeling of relief Mrs. Thompson met him at the door and gave him a brief account of the painful events of the previous ten days. He at once went up to the sick-room, and pronounced it a case of brain fever. He stayed up with the patient all that night, and on the following morning gladdened the stricken wife's heart with the opinion that with careful attention and nursing the Major would recover.

Dr. Riggs was a medical man whose very look was calculated to give his patients confidence. His mild grey eyes spoke of a kind disposition, but his well-formed lips, partially hidden by the black moustache that was his only hirsute facial adornment, showed firmness and courage. He was perhaps forty years old — it might be a little younger —and he was single. In the city in which he lived he boarded at an hotel, for he had been too much occupied with his profession to furnish himself with the comforts of a domestic establishment.

Under his care the Major began, after a day or two, to show signs of improvement. Dr. Riggs was a tower of strength to that bereaved home; and when one day Mrs. Thompson said to him that he must find country life very lonesome and dull after that of the city, he laughed and said it was the best change he had had for a very long time. He tried to lead the minds of the mother and her daughters from dwelling on their calamities, and in this he partially succeeded.

Mother and daughters took turns in sitting with the patient and attending to household duties. It was an arduous task, and it may be said that the sterling womanly qualities of Mrs. Thompson were reflected in her children. They made it an imperative necessity that Dr. Riggs should ride out and take proper exercise. On one of these occasions, when Ada had been sitting by her father's bedside, knitting, Dr. Riggs came in.

"How is the patient, Miss Thompson?" he whispered, approaching on tiptoe. She held up her hand warningly. "Asleep, doctor," she said.

She noticed a thoughtful look in his grey eyes. He bent over his patient.

"Doctor," she said as he rose, "will father get over it?"

"Most assuredly, Miss Thompson; the worst is over. He will soon be himself again."

He watched her face as he spoke. The change that came into her beautiful eyes was good to see.

Now, the doctor was a great lover of pretty faces, and this devoted daughter greatly interested him. He turned his face away for a moment; the sight touched him. He longed to know the story of these pioneers, for it was a story worth hearing, he knew; but he was at a loss to know how to get it.

Ada glanced towards him.

"Doctor," she said, clearing her voice, "we have been wondering if father should go away for a change when he is strong enough. Do you think it is advisable?"

"By all means, I would," he said candidly. "Your father has been overworked, I should say; and a complete change from the farm work would be beneficial."

She rose. A sigh had escaped from her father's lips; he was waking up. His hollow eyes glanced from his daughter and rested on the doctor.

The doctor immediately rose and, administering

a dose of medicine to his patient, bowed himself out.

"What a kind man the doctor is, Ada," he said faintly, for he still felt very weak.

She did not answer, but fondly stroked his face while she laid her head on the pillow by his side. Her father wondered what the doctor thought of his girl. Could any man fail to be attracted by her? It it were so, he would make a better mate for her than Will. For Will Robinson, he had long thought, was not distasteful to her.

There was a far-away look in his sunken eyes.

"What are you thinking about, father dear?" she asked wistfully.

"Oh, the doctor, dear."

A slight flush rose to her pale cheeks, but she did not speak.

A shrill whistle sounded in the distance.

The Major moved nervously.

"Threshing machine?" he said.

"Yes, father; they will be threshing at Robinson's. They were to pull in this afternoon."

"Harvesting over? I must have been ill some days," he said languidly.

"The Robinsons have been so kind, father. Every day some one called to ask how you were, dear."

A soft expression lingered in the Major's face, and a scarlet flush rose to his pale cheeks.

"Ada," he said in a faint voice, "I have been hard and unmerciful to the Robinsons. But now——"

"Hush, father!" she broke in, tears filling her eyes, for she knew well her father was not strong enough yet to worry about bygone days. She remembered what the doctor had said: "Be careful that a relapse does not set in."

The shades of night were falling around. The sun had set behind a cloud, and cast golden and purple hues across the sky.

A sleepy feeling came over the Major from the effects of the medicine, and he soon fell into a deep slumber.

CHAPTER IX.

THRESHING time brings the busiest of all days. Who is not pleased to see the machine outfit pull in? And what farmer in all the Northwest is not delighted to see it pull out?

From early morn till late at night all is one scene of activity. Consider the housekeeper's task. Why, she is at her wit's end preparing meals for the hungry gang of stalwart men who come in three times a day. The meat has to be there, and the pies, and everything else; for the Northwest agriculturist does not willingly acquire a reputation as a "bad feeder."

The farmer begins, as soon as he can, to haul his grain from the machine to the granaries. It is the visible produce of his toil. Now, for the first time in many months, he can bid defiance to weather and to climatic conditions. Once his grain is bagged he can, if he will, take it to the elevators and get his cheque for it.

Never in the history of the Robinson family had they threshed such a magnificent crop. It was the same that year all over the Great West. Thousands of immigrants from the United States and Europe

came swarming into the Northwest in the following year.

Surely it was the turning point in the history of Canada.

Old Robinson was radiant. His wheat was averaging forty bushels to the acre; it was a lavish yield of four thousand-odd bushels — all No. 1 grade.

"We were lucky in getting a threshing outfit so early in the season," said the old man; "it saves us stacking the grain."

"The turning point" in the Robinsons' fortunes had evidently come. The weather maintained an ideal character for threshing. It was the Indian summer, the most glorious of all weathers with which Canada is blessed. Warm, bright days were followed by cool and invigorating nights. The golden and tinted leaves of the dying trees added to the beauty of the fading year.

In the Northwest housekeepers learn to be neighborly; they have some of that fellow-feeling "that makes the whole world kin." And so it was not surprising that Ada had suggested that she should give a hand to Gladys during the important period of the threshing. At first Dr. Riggs was distinctly adverse to the proposal, saying that after her arduous time in the sick-room her strength would be too much taxed. But he yielded to the girl's entreaties. "You know, doctor, it will be a change for me; and out on the prairies that is a very difficult thing to get," she said.

Since the death of her brother, a sisterly feeling had grown up between Ada and Gladys. Ada had a feeling that Gladys had cared for Alfred, and she knew that Gladys had been Alfred's choice. Under the emotional stress of the past few weeks the girls had sought sympathy in each other's company.

Meanwhile, the star of the Robinson family was in the ascendant, and shone out bravely against the dark clouds of circumstance that we have described. Crops had turned out far better than Farmer Robinson had expected. The proceeds would clear him of debt. He would be able to pay off his mortgage.

Not only had these advantages come to him, but the long-talked-of railway had at last come into material shape. A party of surveyors had been laying out the line to pass near to the south boundary of his land. This was more to his mind than if it had gone through it. It raised the value of his acres considerably without disturbing their layout.

The old man stood contentedly smoking his pipe and watching the pulling out of the threshing machine as it slowly steamed away to the next job. As he watched he thought of plans for the future. He would build a new house and barn.

Out over the expanse of the farm stood here and there the immense piles of straw from the threshing. But they were not larger than the valiant farmer's projects. It is astonishing what a little well-earned success will do. From a chastening

time of anxiety he had been raised to a feeling of comparative affluence.

He turned and went into the house. Gladys and Ada, their sleeves turned up to the elbows, were hard at work at the pile of dishes that bore evidence of the last meal of the hungry threshers. And as the old man sat there the rattle of the dishes rhymed with his thoughts. He pictured his new house and barn. Many architectural plans came before his mind's eye.

He came out of his dreams when he saw Ada putting on her hat to go home.

The girls had finished clearing away the dishes.

"Going home so soon, Miss Thompson? Don't go yet," he said.

"Yes, I must be going, Mr. Robinson; they will be expecting me at home. I told them I thought everything would be finished by now."

"There's no hurry," said the old man. "You must stay to supper. You have been working like a thresher yourself, and threshers are supposed to have good appetites."

"Do stay, Ada," said Gladys.

"Well, thank you both, very much. But I must leave at six o'clock, Gladys."

"Just as you wish, dear. We will have supper at five."

"You seemed to be in a brown study when we came in, Mr. Robinson," said Ada, seating herself.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Thompson, I was thinking about building a new house. I've been thinking of it for some time, but I did not know whether I should ever be able to do it. Now, however, things seem to be shaping towards it pretty good."

"That will be very nice," said Gladys. "Father, why not build it something like Major Thompson's?"

"Ah! your ideas are too big, my girl. Fancy having a house as fine as the Major's!"

"Well, I mean something like it; perhaps not so large, but in that style."

"I'm sure father would lend you the plans of our house, Mr. Robinson, or help you to make a new plan. He's rather clever that way."

"That's a kind notion, Miss Thompson. How is your father to-day? He's had a very bad time."

"He's convalescent, but not quite himself yet. I fear it will be some time before he gets back to his usual health."

"It was all so sad — one trouble following another," said Gladys.

"That doctor of yours seems to be a fine man," said Mr. Robinson, leaning comfortably back in his chair and allowing the smoke to issue from his lips. "He's been over here a time or two; seems quite up in farming. A very clever man he is; don't you think so, Miss Thompson?"

The old man turned, as was natural, when he asked this question, and fixed his eye kindly on Ada's face. A close observer might have seen a flush rise to her cheek as she answered:

"Yes, he is, indeed—a clever doctor and a very nice man."

Gladys rose, and filling the kettle from the large pail in the "lean-to" she placed it on the stove. "Four o'clock, I declare!" she said. "Time passes rapidly when there's nice company."

"I must be off," said the old man, rising; "I must get the cattle in. We always milk at six, you know, and maybe they have wandered some distance and will take some finding."

"What's Will doing, father?" said Ada.

"Fall ploughing."

"And Fred?"

"Oh, Fred's gone with the machine to help stook and thresh. I'll tell Will supper is to be at five," he added.

The girls drew their chairs closer together. Gladys' hand stole into Ada "It's so nice to have you here, Ada," she said.

"Gladys, I'm so glad you and all of you are having such a good reward for all your work. How wonderful it all seems." There was a far-away look in her eyes as she added: "I remember reading somewhere, 'Whom God's hand rests upon has God at his right hand.'"

"Yes, dear," said Gladys, kissing her, "and it seems so much easier to believe in God when things are going well."

"We must trust Him in the darkness too," said Ada.

The tears brimmed in her eyes and fell on her lap.

CHAPTER X.

THERE was a great stillness in the air this evening. It had been one of those rare October days such as are only seen in the Northwest. During the day the sun's heat was still powerful, but the air had an invigorating—almost an intoxicating—quality in it, similar to that which is known to dwellers by the sea. As far as the eye could see stretched the beautiful plains of the rolling prairie, dotted here and there with the stately bluffs. The even hum of the threshing machine sounded in the distance upon the rippling breeze. To a dreamer's mind might come many thoughts. Could he not imagine this great lone land developing in the near future by the work of man into one of the greatest lands under the sky? A country second to none, adapted to the growing of wheat for the world! What vast millions and millions of acres of wild prairie would some day be turned under cultivation! How much golden wheat—bread for the millions—could they supply! Then this great tract of land, covered with innumerable miles of shining railway steel to roll the golden grain to safe storage or seaports! Towns and great cities would be cre-

ated, where would spring up factories and mills as the great richness of the country was developed.

Some such thoughts filled the doctor's mind as he stood by the open window of the sick-chamber and looked down across the endless prairie before him.

Below, the ploughmen were turning up the rich black soil—straight furrows a mile in length. It was the last of the Major's destroyed crop being turned under—the soil being got ready for another year's crop.

The Major was up for the first time. He sat in an easy chair, his knees wrapped up in a rug, an old military forage-cap on his head. Near him sat Mrs. Thompson, busily knitting. On the faces of both were the traces of sorrow; but on the Major's face there was the chastened look of a severe illness, and the hair beneath the cap was noticeably greyer.

"How's the ploughing getting on, Doctor?" said Major Thompson feebly.

"Getting on fine, Major. Looks hopeful for a good crop next year. Never say die, you know. It's a comfort to see a fresh start being made."

"Well, we'll hope for the best," said Mrs. Thompson with forced cheerfulness.

"I think I'd better close this window," said the Doctor; "the air is getting a bit chilly."

But before he did so his eye caught two figures that were coming slowly along towards the house. It was evident that these two people were deep in

conversation. They were not hurrying. The two were Ada and Will Robinson.

The Doctor closed the window with something like a pang at his heart. The sight of those two brought him to a realization of his own feelings. Insensibly he had grown very much interested in Ada. It was really that which had detained him so long at this lonely prairie farm. No doubt his practice in the city was in good hands, and he had been quite content to leave it there. The days, with their walks and rides and exercise, the visits to neighboring farms, and occasional ramblings with dog and gun, had stretched into weeks. He felt himself brought up to a sudden determination. "Yes, the air is a little chilly, Major; guess I'd better set this fire going." He turned to the stove, where kindling and fuel were already laid.

"Oh, don't you trouble, Doctor," said Mrs. Thompson, making as if to put down her knitting.

"No trouble, Mrs. Thompson. You see, I've got so much at home here I might be in my own house."

"I'm sure we're very glad, Doctor. It's been a very great comfort to have you here."

"Yes, that it has," said the Major with a pleased look on his face; "it has been one of the compensations for being sick."

"Very good of you to say so, Major. But I've come to the conclusion that I've got to get back to the city to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Whatever do you mean, Doctor?"

The Major had given no thought to such a contingency.

"Yes, Major. You will get along nicely now. The fact is, I—well, I have stayed here a long time, and I know I'm wanted in the city. I've enjoyed it; it's been quite a holiday for me. But now my patient is doing well, and I can leave him in such good hands, I must remember that others may need my help."

As he spoke there was a step on the stair, and presently Ada came into the room, her face glowing with the keen evening air.

She kissed her mother and father, and smilingly said to the Doctor: "Isn't it splendid to have him sitting up and doing so well? We shall have him out on a horse before long."

A faint smile lit up Major Thompson's face. "I've got to get well, Ada; the Doctor says he's going back to the city to-morrow."

"Going away! Why, Doctor, this *is* sudden. I never heard of such a thing. We won't let him go, will we, mother?"

"Well, dear, I shall be sorry enough to lose the Doctor, but he says he must go back to his other patients."

"But do you think father's well enough to be left to us poor helpless females?" said Ada, looking archly at the Doctor.

"He'll do very well. I don't call either your mother or you very helpless—that's the last word I should use. Well, I'll go and put my things together; I must be making an early start to-morrow."

"Then I suppose we shall have our last game of casino to-night," said Ada; "and I must try to beat you."

Casino was one of the games the Doctor had taught her and her mother, and they took it in turns to play it in the living-room downstairs as a relief to the long hours in the sick-room. Since the Major had been convalescent, too, the piano had been allowed to come again into use. The Doctor had a good voice, and both Ada and her mother were musical.

"Well, Doctor," said Ada, later in the evening, after their casino game, "what song will you sing to-night? Here is the well-worn collection." She handed him a music-book, and, sitting down at the piano, rattled off a brilliant fantasia.

"Suppose we try 'The Last Ros of Summer'?" said the Doctor.

"Too mournful."

"But I'm going away, you know, and may be allowed to feel mournful. 'When other lips'—here's one; let's try what I can make of it. I like the dear old songs from 'The Bohemian Girl;' don't you?"

"Yes, I love them." She began the accompaniment. "You are in good spirits, Miss Thompson; you are feeling elated that you beat me at casino to-night."

"Now, Doctor! Does that rankle in your mind? You actually didn't begin when I'd played the introduction."

"Excuse me; I'm very sorry."

"I'll play it again."

The Doctor was not lagging this time, and his fine tenor voice put unusual expression into the well-known words:

"When other lips and other hearts
Their tale of love shall tell."

As the strains of Balfe's music floated to the room above, the Major, who by this time had got into bed and was comfortably tucked up, said to Mrs. Thompson, who sat by his side:

"The Doctor sings well."

"Yes," said Mrs. Thompson, "and he seems to be growing sentimental."

"I wish Ada was," said the Major with meaning.

The Doctor sang through his song with much feeling, and the closing, "Then you'll remember me," was given with all the fervor of an operatic artist, so well can one sing when the song is truly expressive of the feelings of the heart!

Quiet fell on the pair when it was finished. As

if to break the tension, Ada said, in a businesslike voice:

"How about that change of air that you spoke of for poor dad, Doctor?"

"I would not advise him to go away just yet," said the Doctor, clearing his throat, which seemed to have a sudden constriction. "I will be back in a week or two's time, Miss Thompson, and then we will decide. And now I'll say good-bye, for I shall be away early."

He stretched his hand out cordially, but with a somewhat rueful smile.

"Good-bye, Doctor. Be sure not to be long away," she said.

His eyes dropped before her frank gaze. In another moment he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE sky was covered with grey clouds, and once again, after the procession of the seasons, the snow fell. The Northwest froze up, and agricultural operations were brought to a standstill.

There was an evening at about this time when at sunset the clouds had rolled away in surging banks of gold and red. As the moon rose in a clear sky, the rolling prairie wore a silvery carpet.

The temperature rested at zero, as Gladys noticed when she left the house, with a milk-pail in one hand and a lantern in the other, for the barn, where she was going to do her milking. Everything seemed to be silent, and the frost glittered in the quiet night.

The shadow of a passing figure fell across the open barn-door. It was Ada, as Gladys saw at a glance, as she looked up.

"Ada! Ada!" she called. "Come in—it's Gladys—I'm milking."

Ada had a woolen shawl over her head, and she looked pretty in the light of Gladys' lantern. Her pearly teeth flashed bright as she smiled at Gladys.

"You dear, industrious creature," she said, "I was off to the house to ask if you and your father

and the boys would come over to spend the evening with us. The time of the long evenings has come around again. You've heard we are going to have a dance soon?"

"O are you?" said Gladys, in an interested voice.

"Yes. Dad says if times are bad we must make the best of them. He's getting a bit better, poor man. And you know we have generally been the first to open the season. He doesn't want to interfere with the usual custom. Dad tries to put the best face on things. But there, I'm talking as though bad times for us meant bad times for everybody, which is foolish."

"Well, dear, we shall be delighted to come and see you to-night."

"I needn't go any farther then—I was on the way to the house. You will all come?"

"All but Fred, dear. Fred's still out at the threshing. I expect the people find he's a good hand at it."

"How cold it must be. My! I shouldn't like to help threshing in this weather!"

"Oh, Fred won't mind that. He's used to it. Last season he didn't come home till January. Maybe he won't this year. Machines are scarce, and they have a long run before they get through."

"Poor dad intended to have got a machine this fall, if Providence had not ruled otherwise. You

know, *don't* you, dear? Isn't it a wonder we're so happy as we are, considering all we've gone through?"

Gladys, who had been going on with her milking, so that the tinkle of the milk into the tin pail formed a running accompaniment to the conversation, leaned her head for a moment against the patient cow's flank.

"It is, indeed," she said in a low voice. Memories of the past flashed through her mind. Memories of the tender passages between herself and the dead Alfred. Memories of that awful night of storm and dread.

"Well, dear, I must be going. It's a glorious night. You will all three come?"

"Yes, Ada."

"Dr. Riggs is at our place; he has come over again."

It was seven o'clock when Ada reached home. The Major was in his study with the Doctor, awaiting her return. Dr. Riggs had allowed the Major his first cigar since his illness, and he was smoking it with great enjoyment. As for himself, the Doctor was beguiling the time by reading one of the novels he had bought on the train for the Major.

"Are they coming, Ada?" said the Major, removing his cigar for a moment from his mouth.

"Yes—all but Fred. Fred is still out with the threshers."

The Major had to some extent regained his health, but a discerning eye could perceive that he was not the man he had been.

"You are acquainted with the Robinsons, Doctor?" he said.

"Yes, Major. They appear to be great workers. A sterling family, I should imagine."

"They have done well. Fortune has been kinder to them than to me," said the Major, with a trace of bitterness in his tone.

The Doctor turned to Ada, for he noticed that the Major's voice shook with emotion. "Come, let us have some music, Miss Thompson."

They passed into the living-room, where the piano usually stood. Ada opened the piano, and as soon as she touched it Mrs. Thompson appeared.

"Going to have a little music, dear? I'm so glad."

"What shall it be, Mrs. Thompson? Won't you give us those Lake Como duets you and your daughter played once? I thought they were delightful."

"The Robinsons are coming over, mamma," said Ada as they sat down at the piano.

"That's brave of them. Will they come through the snow?"

"Is it snowing, mammy?"

"Snowing heavily."

"It was quite fine when I came in."

"Yes, but remember, dear, you are in the Northwest."

And then mother and daughter played vigorously and with wonderful precision the well-known duets. The resemblance between mother and daughter was quite observable, and under the vibrant thrill of the music the lines of care seemed to fade from Mrs. Thompson's fine features. Ada took the treble part, as being the more brilliant musician; but her mother's bass was in perfect time, and not a single false note marred her execution. They were all deeply interested in the music, and the Doctor was at Ada's side to turn over the pages, when the door of the room opened and Major Thompson, clad in his dressing-gown, tottered in, supporting himself on a cane till he reached a chair.

So occupied were the three with the performance that they did not observe the Major's entrance.

"Bravo!" he said when the finale had been played.

"Why, father!" said Ada as they all turned.

"My dear! The very idea of you coming downstairs by yourself!" said his wife as she caressed his brow and kissed him.

"There's life in the old dog yet, you see," said her husband with a faint attempt at humor. "Well, Doctor, what do you think of them? Don't they play well?"

"They certainly do; there's more than a touch of genius about both of them."

"You flatter us, Dr. Riggs."

"Our profession is noted for its truthfulness, Mrs. Thompson."

"Well, all I can say is that what I have of musical ability is due to the thorough instruction of the organist of our church in the old country."

"And all I have is what my mother taught me," said Ada archly.

"Take a cigar, Doctor," said the Major, "to celebrate my coming downstairs."

"Thank you, I will. This is a nice change for you, though I didn't expect to see you downstairs before I went away."

They arranged their chairs comfortably around the stove.

"You'll feel nearer civilization when the new railway is built, Major. They have done considerable grading since the beginning of the year, and in all probability the road will have reached by next fall."

"Yes, they have certainly been making the dirt fly. We really could not do without the railway. Look how it will open the country to settlers and how it will lessen the hardships that we pioneers have had to go through."

"What I can't understand," responded the Doctor, "is the ignorance of this part of Canada that seems to prevail in England. Why, as this district is settled up and the railways put their steel roads through, this is going to be *the* great country; and

I'll tell you what, the farmers are the making of it. And to my thinking the life of the farmer is the grandest and freest on earth."

"You are in the happy position of a prosperous outside observer. Farmers have their troubles, my dear fellow."

There was a hard expression on the Major's mouth.

"Major," said the Doctor in a sympathetic tone, "there is success and failure in every occupation of life. My father," he continued, between the whiffs of his cigar as the smoke curled up to the ceiling, "was a farmer. I was brought up to the farm, and the happiest part of my life was spent there. But at the time I did not know it."

"It's often the case that we don't know when we are well off," said Mrs. Thompson.

"Well, perhaps we only find it out when it is too late to remedy it," resumed the Doctor. "When I was scarcely out of boyhood I took to studying medicine. I got a book, you know, and thought how fine it would be to be a doctor."

"It *is* fine; there is no finer profession," said Ada, with sparkling eyes.

"Thank you, Miss Thompson. I assure you, my profession takes on an added brightness from this moment."

"Now you're chaffing, Doctor."

"Not a bit of it. Well, where was I? Oh, when

I left the farm for a university education. Well, that was all right; nobody who has been through college ever forgets what a glorious time it was. I tell you, we boys were up to some larks, though we had to grind awfully to pass!"

"How nice it must be to go to college!" said Ada admiringly.

"Well, my fortunate brother—I call him my *fortunate* brother, you observe—attended an agricultural college; and then what did he do?"

"Became a member of Parliament and made money," hazarded the Major.

"No. He just went back to the farm. Now he could easily buy me out and have enough left to go to Europe for a few years and enjoy himself."

"But money is not everything." said Mrs. Thompson. "Perhaps you have done more for humanity than he has."

"On with your story, Doctor; let's have it. Don't let the ladies interrupt."

"Why, father, you are getting quite yourself again," said Ada, rising and putting her arm round the Major's neck and kissing him.

"Well, Major," said the Doctor, "is not the farm life the healthiest, the most honorable, and the farm the best place to raise children, ever discovered? Are not the farm youth the least tempted? They are far from the gambling resort, the saloon, and all the other pitfalls that are wide open for

youths in the city. Then you may say that quite a percentage of merchants fail in business. Take the number of young men who study for medicine or the law and who are unable to get through their exams. But a very small proportion of farmers fail. Take, for instance, this great new land of ours: how many once poor men, hired farm hands, now own quarter sections, and are rich and successful farmers! Verily, it has come true: 'He hath exalted the humble and meek.'"

The Doctor's eye brightened as he discoursed on a theme that was a favorite one with him. There was silence for a few moments when he had finished, and just then the clock struck ten.

"Now, Major," said the Doctor, "you must not overdo it. Take my arm and I will help you upstairs."

The neighbors did not turn up after all. And after cordial good-nights the house was soon enwrapped in quiet. The snow had ceased, and over the prairie lay a great and mysterious silence. This, however, was only for a short time. Soon the wind arose and began to drift the snow into deep masses around the neighboring bluffs.

All night long the wind moaned and howled around the building. Ada lay awake pondering over the various events of the day, so that sleep was far from her. She thought of Will Robinson, and of her father—of the latter with a pitying love. She

thought of what Dr. Riggs had said about farming. Then her thoughts took a questioning turn, contrasting the experiences of her family with those of the Robinsons. Her father had brought a reasonable amount of capital to this country, and now he was practically ruined—at least she guessed so. On the other hand, their neighbors the Robinsons had started with scarcely any money, and now Mr. Robinson was talking of building a new house. What made the difference? Of course her father had never been used to actually *working*. He had always hired the help he wanted, and wages were high. The Robinsons did all their own work.

Then no doubt their family had lived differently from the Robinsons. They had been accustomed to a different scale of life.

And then on the top of it came the awful run of bad luck.

The poor girl gave a heavy sigh and turned over on her bed. She really *must* get to sleep.

Her last thought was that some were destined to bring money to the country and to put it into circulation and reap no benefit from it themselves. But men like Will Robinson and his father seemed to be the sort of people the country really wanted. And Will Robinson was very much of a gentleman too. Of course, he did not speak irreproachable English always. But he had force and courage; a brave, honest face.

And so thinking, she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII.

THE sisters took it in turns to go down first and get breakfast. Their sensible mother had brought them up to household duties, and they had much more housekeeping ability than the average run of English girls in their position.

Ada was glad that it was her sister's turn on the following morning, for her cogitations and sleeplessness had given her a headache.

Dr. Riggs' practised eye noted that something was wrong: the lips that usually wore a contented half-smile now had the downward curve of sadness. As she came to the breakfast table she felt the Doctor's eye upon her, and tried to shake off the undefined feeling of depression.

Dr. Riggs was puzzled. On the previous evening she had been in high spirits; now she was evidently "down in the mouth."

What was the reason? Various theories passed before his mind.

What a dear girl she was, anyhow! What a wife she would make! Even this temporary cloud made her look sweeter and more alluring. He longed to take her in his arms and comfort her as one would a child.

Then a jealous thought stabbed him. Perhaps this was all because the Robinsons—and especially Will Robinson—did not appear last evening.

For a moment the Doctor was absent-minded. But he was too well schooled a man to forget himself in this way very long. He found that he was actually neglecting to pass the butter. He complimented Kate on her porridge, and hastened to help Mrs. Thompson to some bacon.

"I'm glad you did not let the Major get up this morning, as he was talking of doing last night; eleven o'clock is plenty early enough for him; he must take it easy till he's quite strong."

"Yes, and besides," replied Mrs. Thompson, "he's set on having the dance as usual to-morrow evening."

"Oh, well, I don't suppose that will hurt him; it may do him good. Perhaps it will do Miss Ada good too. You are not looking well, Miss Ada."

"I have a headache; I don't know what gave it to me," she said.

"The best thing you can do is to come out for a quarter of an hour's brisk walk in the fresh, clear air. See, the wind has blown the road nearly clear of snow. I don't think you want headache powders."

"All right, Doctor; I will get my things on."

"Wrap up warm," said the Doctor.

He rose as Kate and Mary began to remove the

breakfast things, and looked out of the window. Mrs. Thompson went into the kitchen to prepare her husband's breakfast.

Was she fretting over Will Robinson? he soliloquized. Good God! that must be so; and something must be done to stop it. "Ada," he thought, "I have learned to love you, but I must see my love thrown away."

The smile on Ada's face when she came down was like the wan sunlight that lay over the snowy landscape outside. It was a smile that looked not far from tears. But she spoke bravely.

"I think my head is better, Doctor," she said brightly.

"Sometimes it is the heart that is at fault," said the Doctor.

She looked up enquiringly.

"And sometimes it is a mixture of both," he continued. "But we must have you ready for the dance to-morrow night."

"I wanted daddy to postpone it, but he wouldn't."

"But you like dancing, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—as a rule. But even what you like is a bore at times—when you are not in the mood for that sort of thing."

"Well, I think it is just what you need, Miss Thompson. It will do you more good than anything."

"I wonder if I might make a confidant of you, Doctor. You remember the line in Shakespeare: 'Canst thou minister to a mind diseased?'"

"Ah, but that was Macbeth. You have not committed a murder."

"No, but I have things on my mind. Doctor, you must know that our prospects as a family are not very good. I believe poor daddy is over head and ears in debt. A curse seems to hang over us and our farming."

"Oh, you must not take it to heart in that way, Miss Thompson. Hope for the best. Things will right themselves. Your father will get well, and then perhaps next season will be an extra good one."

"I fear me, Doctor, it will not be so. I have heard mamma say how when father left England he told all his friends what he was going to do out here, and they gave him such a send-off! I can see that his reverses prey upon him. He will never again be the man he was."

"I understand how you feel, Miss Thompson, but I think you are letting your mind dwell on it with a touch of morbidness. Now you mustn't. You are doing your part well, along with your sisters, as a good daughter. The rest you must leave to God, who in His own good time will make the way plain. I don't want to preach to you, but you will bear these words from one that wishes you well with all

his heart. Again, if you let yourself be so downhearted, I shall have another patient on my hands, and you will not be able to keep up the role of the family comforter and songster."

"You aren't chaffing me?"

"Honest, no! Why, I would do anything for you. Look to me as one of your standbys."

"I will," she said earnestly. "It has done me a lot of good to talk to you, Doctor; that and this lovely fresh air."

"Which is better than all the physic that ever went over the counter of a drug store," replied the Doctor.

* * * * * * *

But that evening when the members of the family circle were at their various occupations around the stove—Mrs. Thompson with her knitting, Dr. Riggs and Mary at a game of checkers, and Kate with her never-failing crochet—Ada looked up from her book and saw that her father had gone over to his desk, which of late he had seldom opened. The others were busily occupied, so that Ada was unnoticed when she moved her chair so that she could look up from her book and observe her father. He had taken a ledger from a drawer and was intent upon its pages. Now and again he put down figures on a sheet of paper with a pencil. He was inscribing the record of his debts. Page after page was turned, and, little thinking that he was observed, the Ma-

jor's face grew more and more serious. His head, now so much greyer than it had been, was bent over the book. She saw an agonized expression of helplessness steal into his face.

Ada's heart ached as she watched him reckon up his debts old and new, and the perspiration of anxiety was upon his forehead. She saw him close the fateful book. She saw him pull himself together with determination. Unconsciously he squared his shoulders and made an endeavor to throw his chest out as of yore. He would make a mighty effort to get out of his difficulties.

He rose and stepped silently across the floor. "Good-night, all; I think I'll get to my little pillow," he said jauntily as he passed from the room.

But Ada was not content with this general farewell. She followed her father into the hall, and throwing her arms around his neck she said: "Good night, dear daddy. I'm so glad you are able to be down again, and we'll get on all right now, won't we? You bet we will!"

"My darling girl! You do me all the good in the world! Well, we'll see what we can do." And kissing her he went upstairs, accepting his daughter's arm till he had mounted the flight.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE scene changes to the log homestead of the Robinsons. But how different a homestead of any kind looks if the atmosphere of success and prosperity is in it from what it does when a cloud of misfortune lowers over it and fills its interior! This is a frequent phase of human experience. When Jim Noggins came back to these parts from the Yukon, where he had "struck it rich," some people were surprised that he wore such shabby clothes. But Jim didn't care a cent. He knew he had $25,000 in the bank and he said he always *was* fond of easy clothes.

In like manner the Robinson household was free of financial anxiety, and it made a lot of difference to it. What mattered the rough old house? They could build a better. It is astonishing what a little success will do!

Not that the Robinsons fell into the error of what is called "putting side on." They were too sterling for that. What they felt was that they no longer had the curse of debt hanging over them, and they thanked God for it.

"It's the Thompsons' dance to-night—are you going, Will?"

It was Gladys who spoke. She was sitting by the stove, knitting stockings. Gladys was a practical girl, and a credit to her dead mother. She knew that stockings would be wanted, no matter how big crops were, and, like a dear, good girl, she made them. And good stockings they were—you can bet your bottomest dollar!

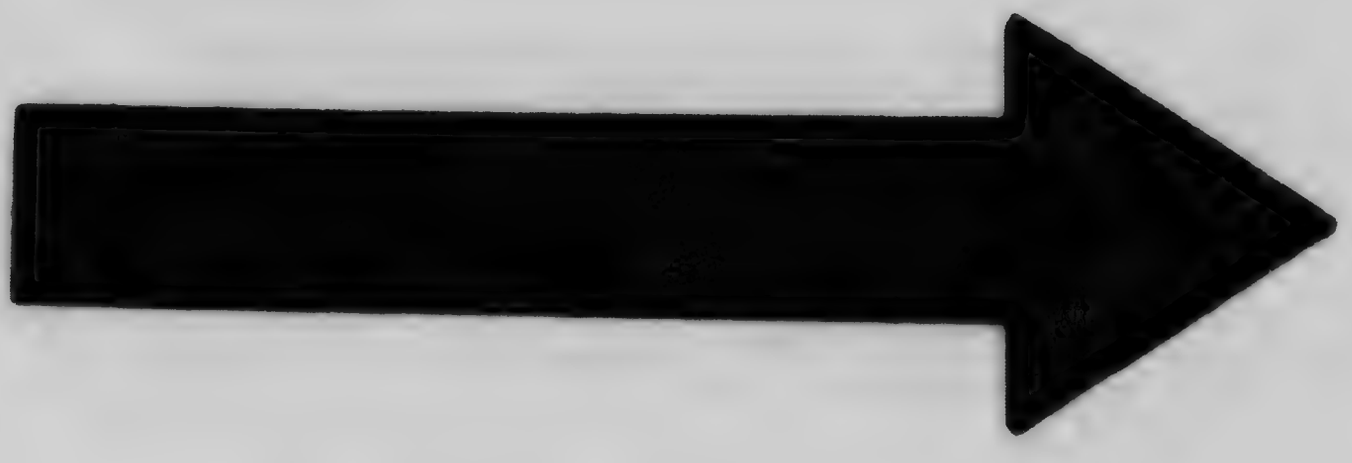
"Sure, we must all go. You too, Dad, you too," replied Will. He was leaning back in his chair luxuriously, and actually smoking a Tuckett's cigar. For when the old man last went to market he had committed the strange extravagance—for him—of bringing home a box of cigars for his first-born—a gift that Will very much appreciated. As an Ontario man he had always smoked "T. & B.," so, of course, he thought that Tuckett's cigars must necessarily be A1.

"You too, Dad," repeated Will.

"Me dance?" said the old man, getting up from his chair. "Well, I suppose I could if I was put to it." Mr. Robinson was still active, and there was a gleam in his eye as he danced a step or two, making as though he had his arm around a partner.

"Yes, father, do go," said Gladys.

She laid her knitting down and picked up a written invitation card. "Mrs. Thompson invites Mr. Robinson and family without exception"—there, father, that's no formal invitation. I know it was Ada wrote it."



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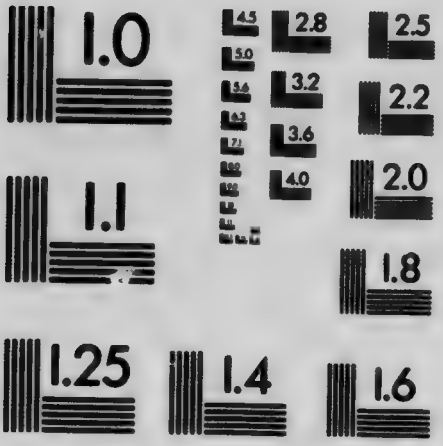

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"It's all very well for young people, Gladys, but when people get as old as I am they do better to stay away from dances. I had my dances, child—long ago—and good ones. Perhaps I could shake a leg with anybody of my age now. But what I'd better do is to stay at home and keep the stoves going. You'll be glad to come back and find a warm house. It's going to be very cold to-night."

The old man glanced out of the window. The sky was clear, but the atmosphere was cold, and the sun-dogs very bright.

"It's a pity Fred is not back; he's so fond of dancing," said the old man; "but it's only one of many that will follow this winter."

"Yes," said Will, "there's the Miles', four miles away, and the Haynes', and lots of settlers scattered here and there that always give dances, and a nice thing, too, in the winter."

"It's ages since I saw Ada," said Gladys, glancing at Will. "She'll be the belle of the ball and no mistake."

Will broke off the ash from his cigar with a conscious look of shyness, which his sister did not fail to note.

"Yes, it's the doctor that's the attraction—he's a fine man," he said.

"All's fair in love and war," said the old man with a wink at Gladys.

"Rather say 'faint heart never won fair lady,'

dad. I'm no match for the clever doctor. Perhaps she thinks he would make a better mate for her than I would."

"We shall see," said the old man.

"But I tell you, Will, she'll make a good wife for whoever gets her. She's a good worker and she has good sense—takes after her mother, and she's one in a thousand. The doctor's a fine man, a fine man he is. But when it comes to choosing a right partner for the girl, why my boy Will is just the stuff," said the old man, clapping his son on the back with a smile.

"Have her, my lad, if you can win her. I know I should be main proud to call her my daughter."

"Well done, dad! You certainly do encourage a fellow, but I'm afraid the fruit hangs too high—it's a cut above me."

"Pack o' nonsense," said the old man. "Of course there was a time when the Thompsons were richer, and the Major held his head pretty high."

"Don't put it that way, dad. I wasn't thinking of that. Ada has a superiority that doesn't depend on how much money her folks have got!"

"I could buy out their whole outfit," said the old man, "and you know me well enough to know that I will do well with my boys who have helped along."

"We all know that, father. But I should not think of presuming on what is, after all, something

like an accident; we've worked hard, and things have happened to turn right side up—but they haven't changed us. I was just as fit to woo Ada a year ago as I am now."

"Yes, there is something in that," said Mr. Robinson, stroking his chin dubiously.

"All the same, dad, I'm going to put my chances to the proof!"

"Go in and win," said Gladys, looking up from her knitting.

"In my young days," said Mr. Robinson, "young chaps weren't afraid to tell the girls they were sweet on them. They are a bit more bashful now."

It was seven o'clock when Will and Gladys drove off in the jumper. The moon was almost at the full, and the night almost as light as day. The "moon dogs" were very brilliant, for the air was extremely cold. And it was very still, as is the case when the temperature drops to forty degrees below zero. A quarter of an hour's steady trot brought them alongside the Thompsons' house, where, after putting up their rig, the Major welcomed them into the large, warm dining room, converted for the occasion into a ball room.

Already several couples had arrived, and the first dance was in full swing when they entered.

"How well she looks," said Gladys, with admiration.

Will glanced towards the couple. It was Ada and the Doctor gracefully swinging around to the gay tune of a merry waltz.

A jealous feeling passed through Will, but he successfully shook it off, and, seeing the Major by the piano, went up to him. Young Miles had paired off with Gladys as his partner. Kate Thompson was at the piano—Mary was one of the dancers, Calder, a settler of the neighborhood, being her partner.

"Major, your daughter Ada looks lovely," Will burst out emphatically. Mrs. Thompson, who had been busy in the kitchen with the refreshments, came in at that moment, and looked with maternal pride on the scene. It reminded her of her youthful days.

Major Thompson smiled at Will's impulsiveness and his eyes followed the couple as they swept by to the rhythm of the music.

Ada's bright eyes lowered and a pretty blush rose to her cheek. She had heard Will's remark.

The Major was thinking. The doctor and Will Robinson in love with his girl, eh! The doctor he had long singled out as a superlatively good partner for life for Ada. But Will Robinson! How about the young fellow who stood at his elbow? There was not the disparity in years between him and Ada that there was in Dr. Riggs' case. But could he make Ada happy?

Thoughts came through his mind in a flash. The Robinsons were emerging into easy circumstances. His examination of his ledger last evening had shown that he was practically ruined. He had tried to shake off the dread that this inspired, but it would recur again and again. If a marriage were arranged between Ada and Will it might, to put it in military phrase, be the saving of his position. Should his daughter marry Will the Robinsons would help him out of the infernal hole he had got into. There would be no seizure of the farm, followed by a sheriff's sale.

The music suddenly stopped and the whirl of the dancers ceased. Will hastened across the room towards Ada, and Dr. Riggs, seeing him approach, bowed himself away.

"You will be my partner in the next waltz, Miss Thompson?" he said.

"Yes," and she smiled. Such a pleasant smile Will thought it was.

He positively blushed to the ears as he held out his hand.

"You overheard what I said just now," he said in a low voice. "Perhaps I should apologize, but I don't feel much like it."

"Will, if you only knew how I detest flattery," she said.

"It was not flattery, Ada—for if you call me Will, I shall call you Ada."

"Well, that's settled then," she said brightly. Then, with the inconsequence of her sex, she said, "Oh, Will, I'm not myself to-night, I've got a load on my mind. I did not want daddy to have this dance even. Oh, I am well enough, Will—only troubled and anxious." Her eyes filled with tears.

"Can I help you in some way?"

"No, I. Nobody can help me," she said, pathetically.

"Oh, Ada," Will burst out passionately, "if you only knew how I love you you would tell me all your trouble."

She gave him a look in which comprehension and hope were combined with the most lovely blush.

"Oh, Ada, do not scorn me. I have loved you for years—long, long before you knew——"

"Knew whom?"

"The doctor."

"Foolish boy," she said, recovering herself and archly patting his head, "why, the doctor is a dear man, but he's nearly old enough to be my father."

Just then the Major called out "Partners for the polka!"

She saw the doctor approaching to claim her as his partner.

"So long, Will," she said as she left him. There was a tender look in her dark eyes, such as a girl only grants to the man she loves.

Talk about aviation! Will felt as though he were going up in such a way as to beat the record.

"The dance is doing you all the good in the world, Miss Thompson; more than all my medicines would."

"I hope you are enjoying it, doctor. If you had not stood by us and used your skill we should not be dancing to-night."

As for Will, he made himself so agreeable to a little old maid that was there—a prim little body who was lamenting up to that time that she had not had a partner—that she said afterwards that "young Mr. Robinson was a real gentleman." And in her spinsterly heart she actually wondered if she was too old to be his partner for life. For the romance of youth takes a long time to die.

And as Will went home all unconscious of Miss Weatherly's tender feelings towards him, he felt that for Ada and him a step had been taken that was delightfully irrevocable.

They could never be the same again as they had been before this memorable night.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was in the early hours of the morning when Gladys and Will arrived home from the dance. The farmer, their kind old parent, had retired for the night, after filling the box-stove with wood to its fullest capacity. So they found the old log building comfortably warm. This they thoroughly appreciated after their cold drive through the Northwest wi.. ..y weather. A strong, bitter wind had sprung up ..om the northeast, drifting the snow hither and thither and covering the cutter and its occupants with a blinding spray.

The quickest and pleasantest way of passing the long winter months has ever been a problem to the settlers of the West, when neighbors were ..w and far between, and, moreover, when the railway and the nearest town lay twenty, thirty and even sixty miles away from them—as many of the old pioneers have known—the short days and long nights drag slowly. The winter seems an eternity.

One marvels at the lone bachelor homesteaders. And yet, whether successful or not, are they not the glory of the country? Those who have known the life know how bright a spot was the eventful evening recorded in the preceding chapter.

But it was the prelude to events of quite another character. And these were ushered in by wild and tremendous weather.

A wild blizzard raged over the Northwest. There was a great fall of snow, and the wind blew a hurricane. The air was dark with blinding snow. No one ventured outside more than was necessary. Stock had to be fed and attended to, but barring this and seeing that the wood supply for the stove was sufficient, the inside of the house afforded the strongest attraction to the lonely settler.

But there came a day when the wind ceased. The snow, like huge white mountains, was packed around the buildings and bluffs. The sky of leaden grey had changed, and the sun-dogs shone bright in the deep blue sky.

There is a great silence in the Northwest on such occasions.

A knock came at the door of the Robinson homestead.

Will, who was sitting by the stove, rose and opened it.

"Why, Jack, come in," he said, seeing one of Major Thompson's hired men outside.

Jack came in and closed the door behind him.

"Will," he said hastily, "the Major wants to see you. He's had a fit. He's in bed. They're afraid he's dying."

"Dying!" exclaimed the old farmer, amazed.

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Robinson. We got the doctor over—telegrafted for him. He looked orful serious over it."

"Good God!" groaned Will, "it surely can't be as bad as that."

"There's a hoodoo on the place, Will. We're up against it. Horses taken sick a week ago—three on 'em died."

"Lost three horses? That's terrible hard luck," said the old man.

"Well, you see, Master Robinson, feed's scarce. We've got no oats. It was that darned hailstorm that jiggered us up. We had to work the horses hard last fall to get all the land ploughed up. It run them down. This cold weather's done the rest."

"What awful news," said Gladys.

Will rose to leave, and without hearing anything further hurriedly went out.

"Yes, it's orful bad, miss," said Jack, "but the worst of all is the old man bein' took like this. He's had it 'ard, he has. I never seed a man so onfortnit in all me born days."

Will was plunging through the drifts towards the Thompsons'.

"Wait a bit, Jack," said the old man, "I'll hitch up and take the Major a load of oat sheaves. Give me a hand, Jack."

"Sure I will, sir; that's truly friendly of you, Mr. Robinson."

They went out into the yard to load up the hay-rack.

"By gad, Mr. Robinson, you have fine oat stacks," said Jack, as the old man drove the hay-rack alongside one of them. "Like ours last fall, eh, Mr. Robinson?"

The old man well remembered them.

"We put up four beauties, didn't we?"

The old man well remembered them and the trouble he had with the Major over his cattle getting at them.

He climbed one of the stacks and drew the sheaves out, pitching them into the rack.

"Boss is in a bad fix," continued Jack, placing the sheaves together as the old man threw them in. "He owes me over $300 in wages, and Bert the same. Dear knows when we'll get it. I was thinking of taking up a homestead this spring, but I guess I shan't be able now. I must stick here till I get my wages, anyhow."

"Stay with it, Jack, as long as the Major needs you. You'll get your money some day, rest assured, lad."

"You think so, Mr. Robinson? By gad, it's hard telling. Some say there will be very little left after the sheriff has got his brass out of it. It's mighty hard lines, such 'ellish luck."

"It will change, Jack," said the old man as he

climbed down the stack on to the load. Seizing the lines he started the team towards Thompson's.

"You've done well since you came out west, Mr. Robinson," said Jack, sitting across the sheaves. "It's kind of ups and downs, this 'ere farming in the Northwest. My boss goes down'ards and you climb uppards."

"That's not a bad way of putting it," said Robinson; "a little good management or bad management and good luck or poor luck thrown in."

"It's a tough business, though, this pioneering. By gad, Mr. Robinson, a man has to have lots of nerve and grit to stay with it."

"Well, it pays handsome, Jack—it pays handsome. In a few more years we won't know what hardship means. The railway that passes through here will open the country out."

"Sure it will, Mr. Robinson. And if there's anybody as deserves it, it's you and your boys. Few people have worked like you have. That's been the fault of the Major's plan of business—running the farm on Old Country lines. It don't pay out West, does it, Mr. Robinson?"

"The Major had money, and money breeds laziness, Jack. I and the boys were poor; we just *had* to work. By gad, how we worked! But help the land and she will repay you a hundredfold."

"That's the light I look upon it, Mr. Robinson.

Now, Bert is different. Bert is for going back to Ontario. He takes the Major for an example, and won't listen to me when I tell him there are more succeeding than failing out West. Says it's seven months of winter, when you're nearly froze to death, and five of summer, when you are nearly eaten up alive with mosquitoes. Such people as he had better stay East, I reckon."

"That's right, Jack; they haven't the pluck for out West."

The sky became overcast. The rolling clouds threatened a snowstorm. Robinson urged on his horses, but the trail having been but little worn it took a longer time than they had thought it would to reach the Thompson barn. Once, crossing a snowdrift, the right runner sank, nearly upsetting the load, but after emerging successfully out of that they reached the barn without much more trouble. But the snow began to fall drearily out of a dark grey sky.

Bert, the Major's other hired man, stood in the doorway of the barn. His long, serious face spoke a sad tale.

"It's all over with the Major, sir," he said dejectedly to Robinson, as the latter teamed the load alongside the hay loft. "The Major died about ten minutes ago."

CHAPTER XV.

When Will left the house his mind was full of dread forebodings. He hastened as rapidly as he could across the snow-covered stubble. The Major seemed so well but a few days ago, as if he was quite overcoming the effects of his long illness. What if it were as bad as Jack had intimated!—and Jack was not an exaggerator.

What would become of the Thompson family should the Major die? What would happen to Ada? "Ada shall not suffer if I know it," he said aloud, as he plunged along through the snow.

Then a dismal panorama came before his mind, which included the seizure of the farm by the sheriff; the gathering of all the neighboring farmers to a sheriff's sale, and the ejectment from house and home of the bereaved Mrs. Thompson and her three girls.

"Ada shall not suffer if I know it," he said again determinedly. Buoyed up by resolute feeling and preparing himself for the worst, he reached the door of the farmhouse.

Everything seemed very quiet. His knock at the door sounded dismally. How well he knew the

antique brass knocker that the Major had brought with him from England! It was surmounted by a lion's head, and even this seemed to take on a forbidding expression.

The door was opened by Ada. The dignity of a great sorrow was upon her face, a sorrow that dismissed all conventionality. She put out her hand and drew him in, speaking no word. Then, for a moment, she laid her head on his shoulder like a child, sobbing as if her heart would break.

Will held the hand she had given him, but he would take no other advantage of her overmastering grief. Sacred and holy was the pressure of her head upon his shoulder. Her weeping gave relief to her pent-up feelings, and presently she led the way into the dining room.

"Father wants to see you, Will; take off your overcoat and come upstairs." He obeyed and they entered her father's room together.

Dr. Riggs was stooping over his patient. He motioned quietly to Will to come. Mrs. Thompson sat by the bedside, holding her husband's hand and bravely keeping back her tears. Will was deeply pained to see the unmistakable mark of death on the Major's face. The dying man's eyes turned pathetically to him, and he made as if to speak, but no sound came from his lips. Presently a fit of coughing shook his frame. Dr. Riggs heard it and hastened to the bedside. Mrs. Thompson

had raised her dear one from the pillow, and Will stood there feeling all the agony of a trouble that one can do nothing to alleviate. But it was too late for mortal help—Major Thompson had passed away from this world forever. Mrs. Thompson broke into an agony of weeping and Ada led her away.

"I will go home and bring my sister, Dr. Riggs—she will be a comforter, I know."

"Yes, a good thought, Will—you could not do better. We must all do what we can for these dear people."

The night had fallen when Will left the house, but a quiet wintry peace lay around. The full moon, like a golden ball, was rising in the east, and the bright new-fallen snow shone like silver. Approaching the barn, he saw his father with the empty rack, for he had unloaded it, and was talking to Jack.

And now the old farmer rose to the demands of the situation in a way that surprised even Will.

"It's all over, father; I am going home to fetch Gladys; she will be some help and comfort."

"Yes, Will; that's right. I'm going in to see Mrs. Thompson; I may be able to do something. I must see what can be done to straighten out things. Dr. Riggs is in there, is he?"

"Yes, father."

"All right. You go home and bring Gladys."

After waiting a short time, during which he was busy thinking his plan over, Mr. Robinson went to the front door and was admitted by Mary, whose eyes were red with weeping.

"I'm sorry for the trouble that's befallen you, Miss Thompson, and I wouldn't have come if I hadn't thought I might be of some use; but I should be glad if I could see your ma and Dr. Riggs for a minute; I should like to see them together if possible."

He went into the dining-room and waited. After a while Dr. Riggs led the bereaved lady into the room.

"How do you do, Mr. Robinson. These are sad days," said the doctor. Mrs. Thompson silently shook hands with the old farmer.

"You'll excuse me, Mrs. Thompson, and Dr. Riggs, but I thought as perhaps I might be a bit of help. Being such a close neighbor to you, Mrs. Thompson, I couldn't help knowing that him as has passed away has had anxieties on his mind. He's had misfortunes and I've had good luck.

"Now, what I want to say, Dr. Riggs, is this—and that is to clear business: You are a practical man, Doctor, and you know a deal about farming. Now, if it'll be any ways convenient, I'm willing to place the farm on a proper footing, either on shares or take it over altogether. The Major had his plans, and they should be carried out. If some

ready money's wanted I am ready with it; and we won't have any sheriff's sale or anything of the sort. What I say is, Doctor, that if you'll see how things stand I'm ready to help."

"That is spoken like a good neighbor, Mr. Robinson, and I cannot but respond to it. I will do as you say, and I feel sure it will be a great comfort to Mrs. Thompson."

Mrs. Thompson lifted her sad face and nodded assent. "Thank you very much, Mr. Robinson. God will reward you," she said; then, bowing sadly, she glided from the room.

"You see what I mean, Dr. Riggs. As man to man, I may say that I know this farm is worth money, but I expect it's pretty well loaded up with debt. And I know what debt is, Doctor. There's $600 wages due the hired help—the two lads. That is not a nice thing for the widow to have hanging over her. Then I'm about sure that there's debts for machinery and things. What I say is, let's square the matter up, and you see that everything's fair and above board."

"All right, Mr. Robinson; that's business."

"And if a few hundred dollars is wanted for expenses, Doctor, I'll give you a cheque when you say."

"Right you are, Mr. Robinson. To tell you the truth, you have taken a load off my mind."

"Well, Doctor, you'll find me a man of my word."

They parted, and Mr. Robinson drove the empty hay-rack home. He found Gladys just setting off with her brother.

"Come back as soon as you can, Will; I've got something to say to you."

About an hour after father and son were seated together in the familiar old room. The old man put a fresh supply of wood into the stove, filled his pipe and began the story of what he had said at the Thompsons'.

"Dad, I'm proud of you. You have done just the right thing."

"Well, my lad, I've got you chaps to think of, and, besides, if this comes to anything it will be right and square, and a benefit to my children; if not, I don't stand to lose much. A stitch in time saves nine, and a few hundred dollars at a pinch may save ruination. Who'd have thought that I should have the money to do it? There's been a change from some times we've had, eh, Will?"

"There has, indeed, father," said Will earnestly, "and we may be very thankful for it."

CHAPTER XVI.

After the funeral, which was attended by all the settlers for miles around, Dr. Riggs began to take steps to carry out the arrangement proposed by Mr. Robinson. He sent for a professional accountant with whom he was acquainted in the city, and in a few days a full statement of the late Major's assets and liabilities was made out, and his stock, plant and land were properly valued. On the whole, it turned out better than had been expected. It had been the want of ready money that had crippled the Major; and even now no proper settlement could be made without the advances that Mr. Robinson had promised. In these the farmer was as good as his word. The two hired men were paid their arrears of wages. Bert went back to Ontario, but Jack was retained at the farm. A few pressing debts owing to creditors who had been threatening legal action were paid off, as also were the funeral expenses and the Doctor's bill, which was very moderate.

Ultimately it was arranged that the farm should be carried on under the oversight of Mr. Robinson on a partnership basis, subject to six months' notice by either party of the termination of the agreement.

Proper papers were drawn up and everything put in ship-shape. Dr. Riggs was of the greatest use as an adviser while the negotiations were going on. In his opinion the arrangement made was the best possible.

The widow and her daughters were therefore looking forward to doing all in their power to deserve success. But six months had barely passed when an event occurred which changed all their plans.

One day, after driving to town to take in some eggs and butter—for the girls had turned their attention energetically to poultry-keeping—and to get the mail, Ada came running to her mother with a large official-looking letter bearing the stamp of a firm of legal practitioners in London. He informed Mrs. Thompson that an uncle of hers had died in Australia and had bequeathed her $50,000. The news seemed almost incredible, and the letter fell from her nerveless hands.

"Oh, if this had only come before your poor father died!" she said.

"What is it, dear? May I look?" said Ada.

"Yes, child. It means relief from worry and anxiety. It means independence for you three girls and me."

Ada read the letter. "What a joyfully pleasant thing! Why, it's the most wonderful letter! I can scarcely believe it."

"Tell your sisters, dear."

Ada was off to the kitchen immediately, where she found Kate making cheese, and Mary, with her sleeves rolled up, immersed in the mysteries of bread-making.

"Girls, don't be frightened; but mother's got a letter that says we've come into ever such a lot of money."

Kate and Mary stood transfixed.

"What shall you do, mammy dear?" said Ada, going back to her mother.

"I shall first pay Mr. Robinson back what he advanced for our personal expenses so kindly. I know it was very good of him, but it cut me to the heart not to be able to pay those things myself."

"Dear, dear mammy; and you never said a word!"

"I had to think of you and your sisters."

"And what else shall you do, mother?"

"I shall go back to England for a long, long visit, and take you three girls with me."

"You'll come back again, mother? We have all got used to this place now. Besides, we are getting on well, are we not?"

"Yes, dear, the farm promises very well indeed—thanks to Mr. Robinson. I am quite satisfied with the arrangement we entered into. I don't think there is any need to vary it. Of course, I shall ask Dr. Riggs and be guided by his advice."

Kate and Mary had to come in and see the letter. Every word of that interesting sheet was scanned,

from the address of the London solicitors' office to the signature at the bottom.

"Isn't it wonderful?" said Mary.

"It is the strangest thing that has happened in *my* short life," said Kate.

"I believe you girls would be content to go away to England to-morrow," said Ada.

"Well, why not, Ada? Of course, England has great attractions."

"I think you would soon get tired of it, after having been used to the free life out here. Fancy being cooped up in a great city and having to go miles and miles before you could leave the houses behind."

"Oh, I don't know; a city's very convenient. You can see lots of people, and some of them are sure to be nice," said Mary.

"But perhaps Ada is thinking that there cannot possibly be anybody in England quite so nice as a certain young Western farmer that we know of," said Kate archly, at which a tell-tale blush rose on Ada's soft cheek.

"I have no doubt you will find at least half a dozen sweet young men waiting for you on the pier as soon as the ship gets into port. They are thinking a good deal of Canadians over there, you know."

"There, Kate, you've got a Roland for your Oliver," said her mother laughingly.

CHAPTER XVII.

In his capacity of adviser of Mrs. Thompson, Dr. Briggs had been over several times during these months, and he always made a point of visiting the Robinson family. He had come to recognize the sterling qualities of the old farmer, with whom he had much conversation on the progress of affairs on the Thompson farm, and incidentally on that of the Robinsons.

It may also be said that on these occasions he was more attracted by the beauty and amiability of Gladys. He felt that she was a girl of more than ordinary gifts. She was womanly and gentle, and though she was a hardworking girl, there was a grace and daintiness about her face and well-developed figure that he felt would fit her to adorn any home. He had by this time come to realize that Ada's heart was engaged elsewhere, for though no definite engagement had been arranged between her and Will, it was plainly to be seen that there was a tacit understanding between them.

So that at this time it may be said that the worthy doctor would have felt very much discomposed and disconcerted if any possible suitor for the hand of Gladys had appeared on the scene.

On the part of Gladys there was certainly a growing appreciation of the doctor. Although he was her senior by a considerable number of years, there was nothing "old-fogeyish" about him. In her presence the doctor was at his best. He was good company, and his talk was never lacking in humor and good sense. At the same time Gladys felt that here was a man who could be trusted. The bed-rock of his manly character was sound. Her admiration for him and her friendly feelings were gradually growing into love. This had been going on for some time when the true state of her heart was suddenly revealed to her by a circumstance that at first sight seemed to be of the most casual character. Her brother Fred had been over to the farm of the Camerons, a few miles distant, and on his return, in the course of conversation, he said: "Dr. Riggs was over at Cameron's the other day; it seems he knows them. Maud Cameron seems rather fond of him. She was saying what a fine man he was. It appears they went out driving together, and she was mighty proud of it."

For a moment poor Gladys felt as though she would sink to the floor. She hoped Fred did not perceive that her face went as white as a sheet. Her heart seemed for a perceptible time to stop beating, and then the blood rushed to her face and hung out its signal in a blush. She bent down over something she was cooking on the stove, and made a

great clatter with saucepan lids as she said, as unconcernedly as she could, "Well, Maudie is a fine girl. Why shouldn't she be proud of it?"

But the next time the doctor came he found a strange reserve and distance in this maiden. There was something different from her former manner—a dignity that he had not noticed before. He couldn't fathom it. The effect it had upon him was to make him still more attentive to her and greatly to increase his admiration.

Perhaps her altered manner also led Dr. Riggs to know the true state of his feelings for the girl, and in a flash he determined to put his chances to the proof.

"Miss Robinson, you are different with me today. What has happened—I know there's something?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Gladys, her hands trembling as she adjusted her knitting, "but you've made me make a mistake, I must count my stitches again."

"Can I help you—I'm very mathematical—I can count to perfection."

"Yes, I daresay you can count the pulse of a patient, doctor," she said with a bewitching smile.

"I hope it may be a long time before it will be necessary for any doctor to count *your* pulse, Miss Robinson."

"Well, that's kind of you; now what ought I to

say? " she answered with a conscious blush. " One, two, three, four—— " she went on.

" Oh, it's no use trying to count your stitches, Gladys, and it's no use my beating about the bush. I—— "

He rose and took both her unresisting hands in his—knitting and all. " Gladys," he said, in a deep and earnest voice, " you are a dear, good girl, and I've grown very fond of you. Do you think you like me a little? I know you do."

" Yes, I like you very much indeed, Dr. Riggs," she said, as she looked up at him with clear, earnest eyes. But her maidenly reserve was not conquered yet.

Now, Gladys was sitting in a low chair, and though the doctor still held both her hands, he felt that he was at a disadvantage. Suddenly, without loosing her, he knelt.

" Oh, Dr. Riggs—the very idea! going on your knees—I won't have it," and she made as if to rise, but he held her fast.

" Don't rise, Gladys, you are a queen of a girl and I love you more than anything else in the world. I know I'm not worthy of you, but I want you to join your lot with mine for life and forever."

" People don't hold queens' hands," she said with a twinkle in her smile, but there was such a look of love in her eyes that he dropped her hands and took her in his arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE tacit understanding, of which mention has been made, between Will Robinson and Ada, though satisfactory as far as it went, had given that young Western farmer many a pang during the past six months.

Will had grown handsomer and more of a man since the period when this story opened. He always looked a fine, manly fellow, but when he put on his best attire and "spruced himself up" he was a figure that would take the fancy of any susceptible girl.

There was a fine chivalrous feeling about our friend Will that gave him a particular delicacy in his attitude towards Ada. He felt that he could not presume on her natural feeling of gratitude for what his father had done. He knew perfectly well that if it had not been for his father affording aid at the decisive moment the Thompson estate—stock, lock and barrel—would have been dispersed under the auctioneer's hammer, and that much trouble would have ensued to the late Major's family.

But this should not make the girl sacrifice her

perfect independence. He hated to think that it should make the slightest difference in her choice. And this had perhaps led to those slight misunderstandings of each other which prove the truth of the proverb to the effect that the course of true love does not always run smooth.

So it may readily be imagined that Will felt a good deal more than he showed when one day Gladys brought the news that the Thompson family were going to England.

Going to England! Ada going to England! The tidings made his heart sink within him, and the sunshine of life seemed to fade out and become dim. It was like a douche of cold water. But, like a douche of cold water, it roused the young man to a decisive course.

He felt that he must see Ada at once. There must be no more uncertainty.

Now, strange to say, a similar feeling had seized Ada. Those who believe in telepathy may take this as a proof of their theories. That very evening when Will started off towards the Thompson homestead saw the girl he loved steal out of the back door and make off ostensibly to pay a visit to Gladys.

So, suddenly looking up—his eyes had previously been bent to earth—he saw the dear girl coming towards him. They were nearing a bunch of trees at the foot of one of the bluffs, and the meeting

place seemed a fortunate one. Will swept off his hat with all the grace of a cavalier. Ada's heart bounded as she saw him striding along.

When they met he took both her hands in his. "Ada," he said, "Gladys tells me you are going to England."

"Yes, isn't it awful? I dread to think of it."

Her mouth quivered; her eyelids drooped. But before she looked up again he exclaimed impulsively: "Ada, I love you, I love you—you know I love you—more than words can tell. Will you be my wife—yes, my true, dear wife?"

She looked up with eyes that were as full of love as his.

"Why, yes, Will—why did you not ask me before? You have been so cold to me lately. I have had many a good cry over it. I shall never love anybody else."

He took her in his arms and covered her face with kisses.

"My darling! You have made me a happy man. I don't care what happens now—everything else may go hang." And, kissing her again, he led her to where a mossy bank seemed to be the most convenient seat in the world. And the amount of explanation that these two had to make to each other was of precisely the same kind as time and again has claimed the attention of lovers for ages.

And it was quite an hour afterwards that, arm-

in-arm, they slowly walked to the Thompson house.

Mrs. Thompson was standing at the door. Will lifted his hat and said, "Mrs. Thompson, I have asked Ada to be my wife and she has consented, and I will do all in my power to make her a good husband."

"Well, Will," said Mrs. Thompson kindly, "of course we have known that this was coming for a long time, and I'm sure I hope you will both be very happy. I know you will take good care of her. And, do you know, I believe that my poor husband had this in mind just before he passed away."

Her eyes filled with tears—she could say no more. But she took Ada's hand and placed it in Will's, and her look was more eloquent than words.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. THOMPSON'S legacy naturally made a difference to her view of farming in the Northwest, and Dr. Riggs counselled that she should dispose of her interest in the farm of her late husband to Mr. Robinson. As she was now in no need of money an arrangement was entered into by which on easy terms the worthy farmer could take over the property. The Robinsons were decidedly on the upgrade. As Jack one day said, "Everything as the old man touches seems to turn to gold." It was some compensation for those years of toil during which, as a pioneer, he had steadily made his way against adverse circumstances.

It was with mixed feelings of hope and retrospection that Mrs. Thompson prepared to leave the homestead that had been the scene of so much joy and so much sorrow. There were some articles of furniture that were surrounded by association. There were pictures that they had brought from England when the Major came out. The piano was a wedding gift—that must certainly go back with them to England. That old carved oak chair had been in the family for generations—that must not be left behind. Nor the grandfather's clock—well,

the grandfather's clock might be left. That was a legacy to the Major from his Aunt Tabitha, and Mrs. Thompson had no pleasant memories of Aunt Tabitha's sharp tongue. It should be left for Will and Ada. And so on through a great variety of things. In the upshot quite a bit of furniture and furnishings was left in the house where Will and Jack, the hired man, were to "batch" and mount guard. And here let it be said that Will and Jack proved themselves equal to the occasion and "batched" with a propriety and an observance of the rights of others that was beyond all praise. Of course Gladys had to go over now and again to put them straight.

The day came when the various boxes and bundles and packages and trunks were loaded on to a wagon and started for the nearest railway station. Thirty-six hours after Mrs. Thompson, Mary, Kate, Gladys and many grips and band-boxes started in two borrowed buggies. They were followed up by Will and Ada in a buckboard. That vehicle was narrow, but they found it quite roomy enough, and vowed it was a splendid rig.

Who should turn up at the station in time for the train that was going to take the Thompsons away from the western prairies but Dr. Riggs. Who should come in, a few minutes after—much to the surprise of Will—but old Farmer Robinson himself.

Wonderful to relate, the farmer was dressed in a new suit, of highly respectable cut, and in response to the enquiring look in his son's eyes, he said he had been transacting "a little bit of business."

Ada and Will paced the platform waiting for the train. The long level steel road lay east and west in diminishing perspective. How many had come over those lines full of hope! How many—unequal for the contest with difficulty—had gone back again defeated!

At last a black dot was seen in the far, far distance. When it came nearer it was observed that attached to it was a pennon of steam.

Will's hand clutched Ada's. "Dear love," she said, "I will never forget—I shall always be near you."

"Sweetest love!" said Will.

Dr. Riggs coughed spasmodically and said, well—such things would happen. He was really feeling the departure very much and tried to hide his feelings.

Farmer Robinson, practical as ever, said they must "take particular care that none of that there freight was left behind."

Gladys also tried to conceal her emotions under a joke. She said that this was a fracture that no medical man could cure, whereupon Dr. Riggs said she ought to be placed in solitary confinement.

And the approaching locomotive was growing

larger and larger as it came on. Soon the train thundered into the little station.

"Good-byes" were said, doors were slammed. The baggage was piled in.

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor. There was the heavy cough, cough of the engine, and soon the train glided away, leaving the little station as quiet as the grave.

Leaving poor Will with a very long face.

Leaving Dr. Rigg and Gladys very much occupied with each other.

Leaving old Mr. Robinson whistling very contentedly the "British Grenadiers." For that was positively the only tune that Mr. Robinson knew.

CHAPTER XX.

On the way back Mr. Robinson told Will that he had been to see a lawyer recommended by Dr. Riggs. "For one thing, I've made my will, and for another I've given him the particulars to draw up an agreement between you and me and Fred. You see, it's this way, Will. We've always shared and shared alike, and you boys have worked hard, and so have I, and now we're on the up-grade. You aren't hired men and I can't regard you as such or treat you as such. So what I say is we'll go partners. The way that accountant straightened up the Major's affairs was an eye-opener to me. I seen it was a good method to have—and I propose to keep proper accounts in the same manner. What I intend is for you and Fred to have a quarter each of the profits of the two farms run jointly together. Then when I peg off you will have half the total land and the Thompson house, and Fred'll have half and the old homestead, and, of course, Gladys will have her share, for I'll tell you what I mean to do, Will, next year. I ain't agoin' to move from the old house, but build a new piece on to it. I've got kinder used to the old place and I don't feel like pulling it down. I'll make a good enough house

out on it as 'll suit Gladys and me and Fred till her's married, and perhaps arterwards. Git dap!"

He shook the reins and started the team into a better pace. "How'll that suit you, Will?"

"Suits me all right, thank you, dad! I think that's a fine arrangement. It kind of puts a fellow on his feet."

"And gives him some'at to look forrad to and work for. Well, I hope, please God, we shall all do well. This 'ere's a fine country, Will, to them as knows how to 'dapt theirselves to it—a fine country."

"You bet!" responded Will.

How different everything seemed, compared with a few years ago! Then anxiety overshadowed them and debt weighed heavily upon them. Now, thanks to good seasons, hard work and the fertility of the soil, they were on the high road to financial success.

Mrs. Thompson and her daughters went to England on the steamship *Lake Manitoba,* embarking at Montreal. Will counted the days that must elapse before he could receive a letter from her he loved. Great was his elation when after about a month a letter was handed to him at the post office from Ada. He waited till he was well out of reach of houses on the drive back before he opened it. How precious it was to read at the beginning "My dearest Will." Ada gave a good account of their journey and voyage, and she did not forget those

expressions of undying affection so dear to lovers. If she could have seen how often Will took it from his pocket and read it over and over again she would have been well satisfied as to his devotion to her. It was not surprising that Will had taken the opportunity to invest in a new pad of writing paper, especially adapted for foreign correspondence, and that very evening he was seen to be engaged in the composition of a letter of several sheets.

Mr. Robinson made more than one visit to the office of the lawyer, and there came a day when he and his two sons went there together and the necessary papers consummating the partnership were "signed, sealed and delivered."

Farming operations on the two homesteads went steadily on. They were diversified by the building of a commodious addition to the old Robinson home, to the plan of which the inventive genius of the entire family contributed. An expert carpenter was engaged, and with the occasional assistance of whoever could spare a little time, the new building rapidly grew into shape. Will dared Gladys to nail on the first shingle, and she, not to be outdone, actually climbed the ladder and did it, much to the admiration of Dr. Riggs, who happened to drive up just as she was in that elevated position. For the good doctor often made an opportunity to come over and pay a visit to his lady love.

The farm operations were diversified, too, by the gradual preparations made by Will for the reception of his bride. Though many of the furnishings of the Thompson house remained, there were certain new tittivations on which he had set his heart. He had two of the rooms freshly papered, and had a painter at work for a week. He trimmed the vine that grew over the door and made the garden plot in front very neat.

At last the springtime came around, when the double wedding was to take place, for Dr. Riggs and Gladys had made up their minds that they would be wedded at the same time. What a springtime it was! The wintry weather had broken up, and the warm southerly breeze had wafted soft airs over the frozen land, thawing the snow and giving new life to the long slumbering soil. The glow from the warm sun had brought back long-forgotten memories of spring. The earth would again bring forth her fruit in due season. The trees budded. Green blades of grass shot up between the dry and withered prairie wool. Ice-bound sloughs melted and echoed with the croakings of myriads of frogs.

And now everybody was looking forward to the great event that was to take place at the Thompson home, to which its eldest daughter was to return and take her place as its mistress. The whole country round was excited, for guests were bidden

from all quarters. The amount of millinery that was in progress on the part of the ladies was astonishing. The wedding presents were also being thought of. In fact the great event was the one topic of conversation, and it was several times commented on by the editors of neighboring weekly newspapers, one of whom said at this time: "We understand that a double wedding which is to take place shortly is exciting much interest. The contracting parties are Miss Ada Thompson, daughter of the late Major Thompson, R.E., and Mr. William Robinson, elder son of that worthy old-timer, M[illegible]s Robinson; and at the same time Mr. Rob[illegible]'s daughter, Miss Gladys, one of the most pop[illegible]is in this district, will wed the well-known and eminent medical practitioner, Dr. Theophilus Riggs, a man who has endeared himself to hundreds. The ceremony will be performed by Rev. Peter Axworthy, B.A. As a particular friend of Dr. Riggs, Mr. Jonathan Roscommon, the local member of the Legislature, who has been invited, has signified his intention of being present."

CHAPTER XXI.

A FEW days before the date set for the double event a stalwart and good-looking young man might have been seen pacing impatiently up and down the platform of the little railway station from which the Thompson party had departed on their Eastern journey. Then they had been looking along the line towards the West, but this young man's gaze was directed eastwards. It is needless to say that it is our friend Will, who has come to meet his bride-to-be, and when at last he saw the train in the far, far distance his heart began to beat rapidly. Who cannot sympathize with his feelings when the train drew up and he rapidly scanned the windows of the Pullman cars? Yes, there she was! Her face was all smiles, and how beautiful she was! And she did not care who was looking, either, but rushed straight into her lover's arms and gave him back with interest his passionate kisses.

And how much Gladys and she had to say to one another in their neat bedroom in the new portion of the Robinson home during the few nights before the wedding! What finishing touches had to be put to things, what finery brought from London to be displayed!

The wedding was the greatest success of anything of the kind that had ever happened in the district. It took place in the dining room of the Thompson home, which had been suitably decorated for the occasion. Nothing could be more spirited than the way in which Maud Cameron, who was a practised hand at the piano, played Mendelssohn's Wedding March as the couples were coming in. Ada looked sweet in white Irish poplin, Gladys was a marvel of loveliness in white satin, while their respective bridegroom were the pictures of manly good looks. When Mr. Axworthy began the service you could have heard a pin drop, there was such a silence in the room, and when his mellow, vibrant tones broke that silence with the solemn and time-honored words of the "Form of the Solemnization of Matrimony" tears of emotion came into many feminine eyes.

Everybody said afterwards that the brides looked "just too sweet for anything."

And afterwards also there was a real old-fashioned wedding supper, at the glories of which many willing hands were employed. Three tables were put together to make one long one, and at the head of the table, presiding, sat Mr. Jonathan Roscommon, M.L.A. The toasts of "The King" and "The two happy pairs" were responded to with musical honors, and then there were loud calls for Mr. Roscommon. That gentleman, well known as a good speaker, did not disgrace himself on this

occasion. After some remarks appropriate to the interesting ceremony, he said:

"There is an especial interest in the event in which we have taken part to-day. Not only is it a happy domestic occasion, when true lovers have been united for life, but it is an illustration of what is taking place in the history of this great North-west country of ours. (Hear, hear.) Good seasons and bad come to us even in this Land of Promise, but I have no doubt the brides and bridegrooms on this occasion would think this a good season anyhow. (Laughter.) I am sure from the bottom of our hearts we wish them all happiness. With regard to one member of the group—my esteemed friend, Dr. Riggs, he has prescribed for a good many, but I think he never wrote a better prescription than he has on the present occasion when he signed the wedding register in token that he has prescribed for himself one very good and charming wife. (Laughter.) I am sure we all hope that the tincture will have the best effect. (Loud laughter.) With regard to the other couple, we have a distinguished daughter of England wedding a true son of Canada. (Hear, hear.) What conjunction could be happier or more hopeful? They begin their wedded life amid the brightest auspices. (Cheers.)

"And now, my friends, let us think a little of the work of the farmer in this part of Canada—the Land of Hopes. He has his trials, but he also has

his triumphs, and in the long run he is bound to win. (Hear, hear.) Can he rule the weather—the late springs, which mean at times a frozen crop; the hailstorms and other destructive elements that are apt to ruin the crop that the farmer worked so hard for? Such reverses we cannot help. But we can help the land—soil that may well make us boast of its marvellous fertility. We can help it being overrun with noxious weeds. It has ever been the pride of our good settlers to keep our land as free as we can from that noxious pestilence, the weed. It is a known fact that in some old settled districts the land is overrun with weeds so that the raising of wheat is practically impossible. Such land is dear at a gift.

"But let us remember, my friends, that farming prosperity and financial prosperity are not the only and the chief things in the upbuilding of this great West land. Take our immigration policy. What can be more important than to have the people working unitedly together all in one truly Canadian body? In some districts you find colonies of Germans, Austrians, English, Galicians, Canadians, Americans and other nationalities. Let them remember that first and foremost they are Canadians!

"Then the school problem is another subject of vital interest. Should not legislation deal more strictly with this most serious matter? How many parents are there who do not think of their children's welfare in this respect? How many rural

school teachers there are who are by no means up to standard? Schools may be plentiful, but if they have poor teachers the rising generation cannot be properly educated. There should be compulsory education and good teachers.

"Nor, in the presence of my friend, Mr. Axworthy, can we forget that the religion of which he is a representative must ever bear a vital part in the upbuilding of a great nation. Let us remember that there is something more than mere money, something greater than great railways, and that is the righteousness that exalteth a nation. Let our national life, as also our private life, be based on those precepts of religious duty which are set forth in the Scriptures. Let us have faith in God and faith in humanity and each of us do his or her part towards the building up of the land of the West."

When the speaker sat down the applause was long continued and hearty.

Then in a neat speech Dr. Riggs returned thanks, and Will Robinson, in the first speech of his life, did the same, and did it so that his wife was very proud of him. Not to be outdone, Mr. Robinson, senior, also said a few words, and was loudly cheered when he proposed the health of Mr. Roscommon, which was drunk with the old-time "For he's a jolly good fellow" accompaniment.

From all of which it will be judged that the wedding party was a great success.

CHAPTER XXII.

It was seven years after the events recorded in the last chapter that Mr. Jonathan Roscommon, who was making a round of visits to his constituents, in view of a coming election, called at the farm house that was once the residence of the late Major Thompson.

It was a lovely day in September. The window of the dining room was open, and as he pulled up his team and descended from his buggy he heard the notes of the piano. It was a juvenile exercise that was being played, and, taking the liberty of peeping in at the window, he saw a very small performer in the person of a little girl who was sitting on a high music stool.

"Good morning," said Mr. Roscommon. The child turned, saw him, and came to the window. A bright, pretty child she was, with a wealth of golden hair. She looked at him with wide-open eyes.

"What is *your* na e, my dear?" said Mr. Roscommon.

"Gladys—Gladys Robinson, and I've got a little bruvver Freddy—Freddy's in the barn I fink—what's *your* name?"

"Oh, my name is Jonathan."

"That's a funny name—do you want to see muvver?"

And, hearing voices, "muvver" came in—Ada Thompson of yore—now Mrs. William Robinson, wife of one of the most prosperous farmers of the district.

"Why, it's Mr. Roscommon. And to think I've never even seen you since we were married!"

"That was a great occasion, Mrs. Robinson."

"It was indeed—great for all of us. Come in, Mr. Roscommon—Will will be delighted. Won't you stop for dinner?"

"Thank you. Well, I'll go round to the barn and put up my team."

"Yes, you'll find somebody there, and Will will be in presently."

So Mr. Roscommon, going round to the barn, found none other than our old friend Jack, who knew him again in a moment.

"You are Mr. Roscommon, aren't you, sir? I remember you at the wedding, more than seven years ago."

"And you've been here ever since?"

"Yes, sir. I've been here a matter o' ten years. I was here in the Major's time."

"Not many hired men stay in a place as long as that."

"Right you are, sir, but, you see, with me it's

this way. I've kinder got used to this place, and I goes along that comfortable I don't seem to want to make a change," said Jack, as he assisted Mr. Roscommon with his team.

"Well, how have things been going on? I haven't been here for seven years."

"Well, sir, old gentleman Robinson died about two years ago. Miss Gladys—of course, her lives in the city—has three children. They've got three here—pretty little kids they are."

"And the other sons? There was another son, wasn't there?"

"Oh, yes, Fred. Well, he married Maud Cameron. He lives in the old house."

"All doing well, eh?"

"Doing splendid. They've had their hups and they've had their downs, but the hups 'as been more than the downs and they've done well."

"They deserve it."

"Yes, sir, they do. Old man Robinson was a wonder. The way he struggled on beat all creation. Now they're reaping the effects on it. You see it was a fine thing the railway coming so close—it's made the place. Just before that old man Robinson had the worst time of his life—darkest before dawn, as you may say."

"But just then there came the turning point, eh?"

"Yes, sir—the turnin' pint."